Anselm's Other Argument

A. D. SMITH

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To my daughter,

Eleanor Huskinson-Smith

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PREFACE

I did not set out to write this book: I set out to write a book on Spinoza. That book so burgeoned when I attempted to understand Spinoza in the light of his philosophical antecedents that it became a book on Spinoza and the metaphysical tradition of the West. I am still at work on it. Some time ago I discovered that I had amassed so much material on Anselm (as background to Spinoza's proof of God's existence in the first pages of his *Ethics*) that it had the makings of a book in its own right—especially as I felt that I had come up with a new and interesting reading of Anselm. Hence the present work. Ironically, I have now come to read Spinoza's own argument in a new way, so that the Anselmian background is not as immediately relevant to it as I formerly supposed. Nevertheless, I am grateful for having had the opportunity to study Anselm's work in depth. The more one pores over his writings, the more one is struck by the quite remarkable acuity of his mind.

I have incurred a number of debts in the course of writing the present work, which I am pleased to have the opportunity of acknowledging here. One of the pleasanter experiences I have had in the course of writing this book is that of receiving often detailed responses to questions of mine that I had sent off out of the blue to scholars to whom I was personally quite unknown. The following are those who were gracious enough to respond to me in this way: Richard Campbell, Richard Cross, Melvin Fitting, Charles Jarrett, Alexander Pruss, Gregory Schufreider, and Howard Sobel. In addition there are a number of present and former colleagues of mine to whom I am grateful for discussions of some point or other that arises (or that I thought might arise) in the present work. Among my former colleagues at the University of Sussex I am pleased to express my gratitude to Michael

Morris and Murali Ramachandran; and among my current colleagues at the University of Warwick to Walter Dean and Guy Longworth. Guy deserves an especial note of thanks, since he read through the whole of the first complete draft of this book, and responded with many extremely helpful comments.

ABBREVIATIONS OF ANSELM'S WORKS

C	*De concordia praescentiae et praedestinationis et gratiae dei cum libero arbitrio*
CD	*De casu diaboli*
CDH	*Cur Deus homo*
CV	*De conceptu virginale et de originali peccato*
F	"Lambeth Fragments"
G	*De grammatico*
EIV	*Epistola de incarnatione Verbi* (second version)
LA	*De libertate arbitrii*
M	*Monologion*
P	*Proslogion*
PI	*Pro insipiente* (Gaunilo's response to the *Proslogion*)
PSS	*De processione Spiritus Sancti*
R	*Quid ad haec respondeat editor ipsius libelli* (Anselm's Reply to Gaunilo)
V	*De veritate*

ANSELM'S
OTHER ARGUMENT

INTRODUCTION

I write this book primarily for philosophers, and philosophers are by and large interested in St. Anselm (1033–1109) for one thing: his formulation of the so-called Ontological Argument for God's existence. This argument, which is to be found in the second section of Anselm's *Proslogion,* explicitly concerns, not God, but *something than which nothing greater can be conceived*.[1] Since you understand this last phrase, something than which nothing greater can be conceived exists at least in your mind or understanding *(in intellectu).* Moreover, you can conceive such a thing existing in reality as well as in your understanding. It is, however, greater to exist both in reality and in the understanding than to exist in the understanding alone. Something than which nothing greater can be conceived must, therefore, exist in reality as well as in your understanding, for otherwise you would be able to conceive something greater—namely, such a thing existing in reality as well as in the understanding. Anselm identifies such a thing with God. If this identification is accepted, which most people are prepared to do, we have a proof that God exists.[2]

Although scholars have tried to track down anticipations of this argument in the history of philosophy, all the way back to Plato and Parmenides, nothing of any note has come to light: certainly not any version of what is recognizably this argument. We seem to be dealing with a new move in the history of human thought. Even the idea that God is to be thought of as something than which no greater can be conceived is hardly to be found before Anselm. In Seneca we find the phrase "than which nothing greater can be conceived [*excogitari*]," but its application is restricted to God's "magnitude" (*Nat. quaest.* I, Pref. 13).[3] As has often been pointed out, Augustine, who was without doubt the major intellectual influence on Anselm, often claims that God is that than which nothing *is* greater or better or higher

(e.g., *De Trin.* 5.10.11; *De doct. Christ.* 1.7; *De lib. arb.* 2.6.14)—a characterization from which Anselm explicitly distinguishes his own (R 5).[4] In one passage, however, Augustine does state that God is that than which no *better* can be conceived; and in another he states that no soul has been or ever will be able to conceive anything better than God (*De morib. eccl.* 2.11.24; *Conf.* 7.4.6).[5] Since Augustine states elsewhere that "in things that are not great by mass, to be greater is to be better" (*De Trin.* 6.8.9), we have an at least implicit anticipation of Anselm's conception. Moreover, as *Proslogion III* demonstrates, Anselm himself treats *better* and *greater* as effectively equivalent in relation to God; at the very least he is willing to infer the latter from the former. So Augustine may well have been Anselm's source for his own conception, especially given that, as we shall see later in this Introduction, *Proslogion III* seems to contain a conscious echo of the passage from Augustine's *Confessions* referred to above. The important point, however, is not so much the absence of the conception of *something than which a greater cannot be conceived* before Anselm (at least explicitly), but the fact that it had occurred to no one before Anselm to base a proof of God's existence solely on this, or any other, conception of God.

It is not difficult to understand why philosophers have been fascinated by the Ontological Argument. For one thing, it is unique among arguments for God's existence in that it proceeds simply on the basis of what is and is not conceivable. Later philosophy will interpret it as proceeding in a purely "a priori" manner. It takes no fact about the world—such as that there is a world at all, or that it is orderly, or that it contains beings with moral understanding—as given. It seems to start simply with a certain concept or understanding of God, or the divine nature, and infers God's existence from this.[6] For another, although the argument has been subject to repeated refutations, they are one and all inadequate, and it is in fact somewhat difficult to pinpoint exactly what is wrong with it.[7] As Bertrand Russell expressed the matter, "The argument does not, to a modern mind, seem very convincing, but it is easier to feel convinced that it must be fallacious than it is to find out precisely where the fallacy lies" (Russell 1946: 568).[8]

"Then in 1960," as Alvin Plantinga has put it, "Norman Malcolm dropped his bombshell" (Plantinga 1986: 65). Plantinga is referring to the publication of Malcolm's article "Anselm's Ontological Arguments" in *The Philosophical Review.* In this article Malcolm claimed to have discovered *another* Ontological Argument in Anselm's writings. Although he suggested that this other argument surfaces at a number of points in Anselm's *Reply* to Gaunilo, Malcolm particularly focused on a passage in the section of the

Proslogion that comes immediately after the one that contains what from now on I shall refer to as the "traditional" Ontological Argument. The passage in question (in the translation by S. N. Deane, which Malcolm employs) begins as follows: "And it [*sc.* something than which a greater cannot be conceived] so truly exists that it cannot be conceived not to exist. For it is possible to conceive of a being which cannot be conceived not to exist; and this is greater than one which can be conceived not to exist" (P 3). Malcolm (1960: 45) interprets Anselm as claiming here that "a being whose nonexistence is logically impossible is 'greater' than a being whose nonexistence is logically possible." Whereas the "traditional" argument seemed to claim that actual existence is, as it is often put these days, a "great-making" characteristic, the present passage, according to Malcolm, asserts this of *necessary* existence. This, in Malcolm's view, is a great improvement. Malcolm believes that the traditional Ontological Argument is undermined by Kant's claim that existence is not a real predicate. Whether this is so or not, necessary existence certainly is a real predicate.[9] In addition to arguing that the move from existence to necessary existence escapes Kantian criticism, Malcolm made two other points in his article. First, that it is true that necessary, or non-contingent, existence is part of our concept of God. Second, that from this premise, together with the admission, which he believed we must make, that it is at least possible that God should exist, we can deduce that God actually does exist. This is one version of what has come to be known as the Modal Ontological Argument. We shall examine it in more detail and assess its merits in the following chapter.

Plantinga quite reasonably characterized Malcolm's contribution as a bombshell. His article was widely read, and it stimulated a considerable amount of discussion in the philosophical journals. However, as Plantinga himself points out (though he admits that he was unaware of this at the time), Charles Hartshorne had made essentially the same proposal before Malcolm. Already in Hartshorne (1941: 299–341) we find a presentation of the Ontological Argument that is strikingly different from the traditional version, and that is similar to the argument Malcolm would later present. Shortly afterwards, Hartshorne (1944: 234n7) briefly suggested that two forms of the Ontological Argument are to be found in Anselm: the traditional one that treats existence as a perfection, and a more considerable one that treats necessary existence as a perfection. In Hartshorne and Reese (1953: 96–7) he repeated this claim at somewhat greater length.[10]

Hartshorne and Malcolm's suggestion that Anselm's writings contain a second version of the Ontological Argument—a Modal Ontological

Argument for God's existence that is independent of the traditional argument in *Proslogion II*—has been almost universally rejected by scholars. Much of this opposition is based upon a misunderstanding of the suggestion. Many scholars have argued that if we look carefully at the passage on which both Hartshorne and Malcolm principally focus—the first half of *Proslogion III*—we find that Anselm is not there attempting to prove God's existence, or the existence of something than which a greater cannot be conceived, at all. Anselm has already done that, to his own satisfaction at least, in *Proslogion II.* What Anselm sets out to demonstrate in *Proslogion III* is that this being exists in a certain superlative manner. The argument is not about *whether* something than which a greater cannot be conceived exists, but about *how* it exists. As we shall see, this is without doubt true. This fact does not, however, count against the "second argument hypothesis," as it is sometimes called, since the proposal is not that Anselm explicitly propounded the Modal Ontological Argument. According to Malcolm (1960: 45), "There is no evidence that [Anselm] thought of himself as offering two different proofs." The suggestion is, rather, that what Anselm wrote *in fact constitutes* an argument, specifically a modal argument, for God's existence that is independent of the argument in *Proslogion II.* The explicit conclusion of the *Proslogion III* argument is that something than which a greater cannot be conceived "so truly exists that it cannot be conceived not to exist."[11] This clearly entails that the thing in question does actually exist. If the argument of which this is the conclusion is independent of the traditional Ontological Argument in *Proslogion II,* Anselm will have presented a "second argument," whatever his primary intention was. And if the argument hinges on the notions of possibility and necessity, he will have presented a Modal Ontological Argument.

This brings us to a second and more substantial reason for opposition to Hartshorne and Malcolm's suggestion. In *Proslogion III* Anselm is explicitly discussing what can and cannot be *conceived,* not what is and is not *logically possible.* In order to count as a Modal Ontological Argument, anything that Anselm wrote must involve the latter notion—or its "dual," what is *logically necessary.* Many writers have objected to Hartshorne and Malcolm's suggestion on this very point. Malcolm, in particular, is somewhat carefree here. As we have seen, he comments on the *Proslogion III* passage cited above by writing that "Anselm is saying . . . that a being whose nonexistence is logically impossible is 'greater' than a being whose nonexistence is logically possible" (Malcolm 1960: 45). If we interpret "saying" strictly, Anselm is

manifestly saying no such thing. "Conceivable" certainly does not *mean* "logically possible"; nor does "inconceivable" *mean* "logically impossible." The former have an essential cognitive or epistemic dimension that the latter lack. Perhaps Malcolm was making a weaker claim. After all, it is quite common for people to report what someone "is saying" by stating something that is entailed, or at least manifestly entailed, by what he or she literally said. Be this as it may, if Anselm's claims about what is and is not conceivable do imply claims about what is and is not logically possible, and if those implied claims go to make an argument that is independent of the traditional Ontological Argument, then Hartshorne and Malcolm will have been vindicated.

The issue whether Anselm did indeed take inconceivability to imply logical impossibility is in fact a complex one. Of course, if the question is whether Anselm possessed precisely the modern concepts of "logical possibility" and "logical necessity," informed as they are by the work of Hume, Russell, and Carnap, not to mention more recent figures such as Kripke and Kaplan, it has a foregone conclusion. The question can, however, be posed in a less absurd way. It can be posed as the question whether Anselm believed that if something is inconceivable, it is *absolutely impossible*. The latter I take to be a basic and intuitive notion.[12] It is far from absurd to suppose that Anselm possessed such a concept; nor to suppose that he believed that if something is inconceivable, it is absolutely impossible. It is *this* issue that is complex. In opposition to the majority of scholarly opinion, I shall argue in Chapter 2 that Anselm did believe that what is inconceivable is absolutely impossible, and conversely. If this is right, it remains a possibility not only that Anselm implicitly presented a second Ontological Argument, but that this argument can legitimately be construed as a modal one.

In fact, however, there is no Modal Ontological Argument anywhere in Anselm's writings, even implicitly—or so I shall argue. And yet there is indeed a "second argument."[13] It is not, however, to be found anywhere in the *Proslogion*. It surfaces, rather, in a number of passages in Anselm's *Reply* to Gaunilo, most of which have been misinterpreted by Malcolm, Hartshorne, and others as expressions of the Modal Ontological Argument. It is this argument to which the title of the present work refers. This is Anselm's "other argument."[14] It has, I believe, much more to be said in its favour than either the traditional or the Modal Ontological Argument. Unlike these two arguments, it turns on certain fundamental metaphysical issues. On the other hand, it is, like them, entirely a priori in character. If the latter suffices

for an argument to count as a version of the Ontological Argument, we can perhaps dub Anselm's "other argument" the *Metaphysical Ontological Argument.* After having unearthed it, we shall see what there is to be said for it.

The order of proceedings is as follows. In Chapter 1 I lay out the Modal Ontological Argument, and assess its merits. In the following four chapters I investigate whether any such argument is to be found, even implicitly, in Anselm's writings. In the first of these chapters, Chapter 2, I argue that Anselm took inconceivability to imply absolute impossibility, and conversely, so that we cannot rule out *ab initio* the suggestion that there is indeed such an argument in Anselm. In Chapter 3 I investigate Anselm's understanding of the modal notions of possibility and necessity. In Chapters 4 and 5, respectively, I examine the *Proslogion* and the *Reply* to Gaunilo—the only places where a Modal Ontological Argument could possibly be found—and conclude that no such argument is to be found there. In Chapter 6 I unearth Anselm's real "other argument." In Chapter 7 I assess its merits.

Before getting down to business, I feel I should say something about the issue whether Anselm in fact ever attempted to prove God's existence. That there is such an issue may be surprising to some readers. As I said at the beginning of this Introduction, philosophers are generally interested in Anselm for one thing: the Ontological Argument for God's existence. Was there no such thing? In fact, the issue is debatable. Many scholars—I do not mean philosophers, but historically informed scholars, including several theologians—most notably, perhaps, Karl Barth (1960), have argued that Anselm never attempted to prove God's existence. All his ruminations, the suggestion is, were conducted within the ambit of faith in God, and were in no way supposed to provide a rational basis for such faith. Anselm's supposed "proof" of God's existence is, on this view, but one aspect of his use of reason to come to a fuller understanding and appreciation of a faith that is already in place. As Anselm informs us in the Preface to the *Proslogion,* the original title of that work was, famously, *Fides quaerens intellectum:* Faith Seeking Understanding. In a survey of the literature on Anselm, Arthur C. McGill (1968: 62 n103) documents a distinct shift in scholarly opinion towards the "Barthian" understanding of Anselm in the first half of the twentieth century.

Jonathan Barnes, certainly a historically informed philosopher, will have none of this. There is, he claims, "overwhelming textual evidence

against it" (Barnes 1972: 6). He cites only one passage in support of this, however. It is a passage in which Anselm states that in the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion* he had set out to show that "what, apart from the Incarnation, we hold by faith concerning the divine nature and its persons can be demonstrated by necessary reasons without the authority of scripture" (EIV 6). This is not the decisive evidence that Barnes takes it to be. For one thing, the fact that the reasons Anselm adduces have a force that is independent of the authority of scripture does not imply that Anselm believed them to have a force independent of faith. Indeed, earlier in this very work Anselm inveighed against the pretensions of human wisdom trusting in itself. In this connection Anselm cites scripture—"If you do not believe, you will not understand"—and adds in his own words that if one is to understand the truths of religion, "the heart is first to be cleansed by faith."[15] Those who lack such faith will "be forced to descend into manifold errors through defective understanding" (EIV 1). It is true that Anselm characterizes his demonstration as based on "necessary reasons"; but we should be careful that we do not read too much into this phrase. As a number of scholars have pointed out (e.g., Jacquin 1930: 72), Anselm's use of the phrase probably draws on early mediaeval traditions of rhetoric and dialectic in which it had a sense somewhat weaker than it would today naturally be taken to have. "By this phrase," according to David Knowles (1962: 101), "in which the word *necessarius* bears a technical meaning, [Anselm] certainly did not mean that all the truths of faith [apart from the Incarnation] could be established by demonstrative arguments that would be irresistible to any who used their reason aright. . . . The adjective *necessarius* means 'formally admissible,' 'probable,' rather than 'compelling,'"[16] Even if we do not go this far (as, I shall argue later, we should not), it may certainly be the case that Anselm took his demonstration to be cogent only given certain presuppositions—or, less prosaically, only given a context of faith. Even aside from this issue, it is far from clear that "what . . . we hold by faith concerning the divine nature and its persons" was meant by Anselm to include the basic belief that God exists. The latter is not obviously a belief that one holds concerning the divine *nature;* and it certainly is not about "its persons"—the doctrine of the Trinity.

There are, however, other passages that might be adduced to show that Anselm really did set out to prove God's existence. In the Preface to the *Proslogion,* for example, Anselm tells us that after having written the *Monologion,* with its somewhat lengthy and complex argument, he sought a single self-sufficient argument that would prove, among other things, "that

God truly exists [*quia Deus vere est*]."[17] Moreover, the very heading to *Proslogion II,* the section of this work that contains the traditional Ontological Argument, reads "That God truly exists [*Quod vere sit Deus*]."[18] Anselm Stolz has attempted to undermine the possible significance of these passages by claiming that Anselm only ever employs the notion of *truth* in relation to existence to express the Augustinian (and ultimately Platonic) idea of eternal, unchanging existence. According to Stolz (1968: 204 n97), "In the context of the *Proslogion* the phrase *vere esse* never has the general meaning of 'to exist' "—as it must, if the two passages we are considering are to be relevant to the present issue. Of course, if something "truly exists," it exists; but an argument that something truly exists need not be an argument that something exists, since the argument may simply presume existence and focus on the manner of existence. That Anselm had a deep knowledge of Augustine's thought, and that he revered it, are points that are beyond dispute.[19] Equally indisputable is the fact that Augustine did employ the notion of "truly" existing to express the sort of eternal existence that is peculiar to God.[20] So the suggestion that Anselm restricted the phrase "truly exists" to eternal existence is not antecedently implausible. Indeed, there may be some presumption in its favour. Nevertheless it is false, and Stolz is mistaken. For one thing, the force of Stolz's claim that "truly exists" never has the general sense of really or actually existing in the *Proslogion* is undermined by the fact that, apart from the two passages now in question, Anselm never employs the phrase at all in this work. Perhaps Stolz had *Proslogion III* in mind. As we shall see in more detail later, Anselm does here, at least by implication, ascribe eternal unchanging existence to that than which a greater cannot be conceived by employing the notion of *truth* in relation to existence. The phrase that he uses to express it is not, however, "truly exists," but "exists so truly that it cannot be conceived not to exist."[21] Anselm also states in the same chapter that that than which a greater cannot be conceived possesses being "most truly [*verissime*]" and "maximally [*maxime*]." Not only does Anselm's employment of these phrases, which certainly do express eternal existence, not imply that "truly exists" expresses it, if anything they imply the opposite, since they appear to be strengthenings or intensifications of it. It is not that Anselm disagreed with Augustine's views on this matter. *Monologion XXVIII,* for example, is pure Augustine. Temporal, changeable things "almost do not exist," Anselm states; they "barely exist." The point is that Anselm never uses the phrase "truly exists" to express the eternal divine existence that contrasts with this meagre, creaturely existence. In the *Monologion* God (or the "supreme

essence" that is eventually identified with God) is characterized as existing "simply" (or perhaps unqualifiedly: *simpliciter*), "perfectly," "absolutely"—but never "truly."

By contrast, there are several passages where Anselm does employ the notion of truly existing—and they all deal with actual existence. It is perhaps worth noting, first, that *"vere"* ("truly") is Anselm's absolutely standard term for *actually* or *really*—or, as we can naturally say in English, *truly*. For example: "Thus You are *truly* percipient, omnipotent, merciful and impassible just as You are living, wise, good, blessed, eternal, and whatever it is better to be than not to be" (P 11). Another example is provided by a passage in which Anselm gives voice to a standard puzzle concerning the Trinity. It has already been shown that the Father, the Son, and their Spirit "truly exist." Anselm then goes on to claim that, although each speaks, there are not three speakers, but one. Now, the three Persons of the Trinity of course all "truly exist" in the Augustinian sense; but this is irrelevant to the issue that Anselm is dealing with in this passage, which is a problem that supposedly arises from the fact that there really and irreducibly are three divine Persons. Another significant passage is the following: "Necessarily, everything that is useful or excellent, if they are *truly* good, are good through that one thing through which it is necessary for all good things to exist" (M 1). This passage is particularly significant because here, in true Platonic fashion, Anselm is claiming that finite, changeable, partial goods are good because they participate in an eternal good; and yet Anselm employs the term "truly" to characterize the finite exemplars, not the one absolute good. The following passage, along similar lines, is even more significant: "Hence there is a certain nature or essence that is good and great through itself, and that is the very thing that it is through itself, and through which exists whatever truly is either good or great *or something*" (M 4). Once again, it is the finite beings that are characterized as being "truly" of a certain nature—in order, clearly, to set aside merely sham or spurious examples. What is significant in this passage is that this is extended to truly *existing*. In *Monologion I* Anselm had argued that whatever is good is good through one thing that is good through itself. In *Monologion II* he extended this to whatever is great. In *Monologion III* he extended it to whatever exists: whatever exists exists through something that exists through itself. The "truly is . . . something" of *Monologion IV* picks up on this last step. Anselm is saying that whatever "truly exists"—including finite changeable things—exists through something self-existent. "Truly" means *actually* or *really*. Moreover, there is a passage in Anselm that deals explicitly with God's

superlative and eternal manner of existence that, ironically in relation to Stolz's position, reinforces the present line of argument. Anselm has claimed that God's existence, unlike ours, is not strung out through time. In particular, there is no past or future for God. But in what way, he now asks, does God not have a present, if He "truly exists" (M 21)? The question is clearly rhetorical, and the response is meant to be obvious: God must and does have a present. The only way to make sense of the rhetorical force of this question is to construe Anselm as arguing as follows. All things that truly—actually—exist, at least exist in the present. For changeable, temporal things this is, indeed, their sole genuine existence. As Augustine famously claimed in his *Confessions,* the past does not exist, nor does the future. The actual existence of temporal things is confined to the vanishing present. As Anselm puts it, "What they are in the slipping, very brief and barely existent present barely is" (M 28). Still, in so far as they do actually ("truly") exist, they have a present. If God actually ("truly") exists, He, too, must therefore have a present. It is just that in His case the present is permanent and inalienable. This line of thought only makes sense if truly to exist simply means actually to exist.

Other passages where Anselm employs the notion of truth in relation to existence are equally conclusive. In his *Reply* to Gaunilo, Anselm states that things that exist solely in the understanding are "false," whereas things that also exist in reality *(in re)* are "true" (R 6). Earlier in the *Reply* Anselm expresses Gaunilo's famous counter-argument concerning the wonderful island as being to the effect that if Anselm's own argument worked, he could, absurdly, prove that such an island "truly existed in reality [*vere esse in re*]" (R 3).[22] Obviously, Anselm is not supposing Gaunilo to have suggested that Anselm would be committed to regarding the island as eternal. Finally, in his treatise *De veritate* Anselm explicitly states what I have been suggesting underlies all Anselm's discussions of these matters: "Whatever is, truly is" (V 7). All this evidence points overwhelmingly to a conclusion that is the very opposite of Stolz's. Anselm never uses "truly exists" to express specifically eternal existence. When he does use it, it merely expresses actual existence.[23]

Given this, the two passages cited above in which Anselm claims to prove that God truly exists stand in need of explanation if Anselm never set out to prove God's existence. Moreover, there is a third passage that may seem even more problematic. In his *Reply* to Gaunilo, Anselm states that since the Fool has no understanding of God, Anselm has chosen to discuss something of which the Fool would at least have some understanding—

namely, something than which a greater cannot be conceived—"in order to prove that God exists" (R 7). Here there is not any reference to "truly" existing; so Stolz's approach is not applicable. The passage seems unequivocal.

I regard this evidence as incontrovertible. Anselm did take himself to have provided a cogent proof of God's existence. The question is, however, *for whom* Anselm supposed his proof to be cogent. When Barnes (like many others) suggests that Anselm set out to prove God's existence, he clearly means that Anselm set out to provide a proof that would be acceptable to any rational person, whether or not such a person already has faith. The three passages we are now considering do not support this. The first two at best simply announce that Anselm has proved that God exists. There is no indication of the kind of person for whom Anselm supposed his proof would be persuasive. It is no good insisting that if Anselm regarded something as a proof, he must have regarded it as something that has cogency for any rational person. This not only imposes on Anselm a peculiarly modern understanding of what a "proof" must be, it ignores Anselm's repeated claims that faith is a prerequisite for a certain understanding. Perhaps Anselm took his proof to have cogency only for those with the requisite understanding. The third passage mentions the Fool, who, of course, lacks any such understanding; but there is no indication that the Fool is the intended audience for Anselm's proof. What Anselm writes is that he was concerned to prove God's existence *against (contra)* the Fool. He does not claim to have tried to prove God's existence *to* the Fool. For someone like Barnes, the Fool is just the kind of person who is supposed to be convinced by Anselm's proof. It is, however, extremely implausible to think that Anselm took himself to have come up with a proof of such efficacy. In order to see this, we should attend to *Proslogion IV.* It is here, and here alone, that Anselm explicitly directs his arguments to the Fool. It is important to note what does *not* happen in this passage. Anselm does not say that on the strength of his earlier arguments the Fool must concede that God exists. What Anselm says, rather, is that when the Fool "says in his heart" that there is no God, he is either thinking gibberish, or thinking of something other than God. The Fool is never, even by implication, Anselm's intended audience. He is always an outsider—outside the circle of faithful believers: an outsider who simply does not comprehend what Anselm and other believers are talking about. A sufficient indication for Anselm that the Fool lacks such understanding is that the Fool thinks he can conceive that God does not exist. If such "agnosticism" (and even more clearly, atheism) precludes understanding, then, given that any arguments Anselm might offer will, in order to

be effective, need to be understood, no such arguments could sensibly have been intended for any such person as the Fool. As Anselm explicitly states in *Reply VII,* the Fool "in no way" understands God. Moreover, as *Proslogion IV* makes clear, Anselm did not suppose that his argumentation in *Proslogion II* and *III* would have furnished the Fool with the requisite understanding. The Fool is left as an outsider, talking and thinking either nonsensically or irrelevantly.

On the other hand, it is clear, I believe, that Anselm did suppose himself to have provided a proof, entirely independent of faith, of the existence of *something than which a greater cannot be conceived*—or, as I shall from now on abbreviate it, *G*. This is clearly the upshot of the traditional Ontological Argument in *Proslogion II,* which concludes with the following words: "Without doubt, therefore, something than which a greater cannot be conceived exists both in the intellect and in reality." Similar claims are also repeatedly made in the *Reply* to Gaunilo. Here is just one: "If anyone should say that something than which a greater cannot be conceived is not something that exists in reality . . . he can easily be refuted" (R 5; cf. R 10).[24] The cogency that Anselm claims attaches to his argument cannot sensibly be taken as something that only the faithful could appreciate. This is because Anselm has set up his argument as one for the existence of *G,* rather than God, as a response to the Fool. As Anselm makes clear, he chose the concept of something than which a greater cannot be conceived because the Fool would understand this in some way, whereas he understands God in no way at all (R 7). In other words, the argument for the existence of *G* was meant to be convincing *even to the Fool*.[25] If, therefore, the identification of God with *G* were straightforward, it would be plausible to suppose that Anselm did indeed set out to prove the existence of God in a way that would be acceptable to any rational person. The relation between *G* and God, however, is precisely what lies at the bottom of the present interpretative question.

It is, in this connection, astonishing how many presentations of Anselm's traditional Ontological Argument suppose that the argument gets under way with Anselm defining God as something than which no greater can be conceived. Here is just one recent example: "Anselm (1033–1109) proved the existence of God by defining him as 'a being than which none greater can be thought' and by arguing that . . ." (Muskens 2006: 622). Anselm does no such thing. The initial connection between *G* and God is made by Anselm as follows: "We believe You to be something than which nothing greater can be conceived" (P 2). This is hardly a "definition." It is

not even an appeal to what would be almost universally accepted as uncontroversial. In the thirteenth century, John Pecham read Anselm as claiming that "according to everyone God is that than which a greater cannot be conceived" (cited in Daniels 1909: 43). But there is nothing in Anselm to support any such idea; and given, as we have seen, that the very notion of God being that than which a greater cannot be conceived is hardly, if at all, to be found before Anselm, it is implausible.[26] Anselm's whole argument begins, therefore, not with a definition, or a platitude, but with a profession of faith. Moreover, it is one that Anselm would not have expected the Fool to endorse, or even understand, since the Fool in Anselm's view understands God "in no way at all." After this initial profession of faith the term "God" does not appear in the crucial arguments of *Proslogion II* and *III* at all. These are conducted solely in terms of "something than which a greater cannot be conceived." Moreover, when the term "God" is next employed it is in an *assertion* that is *addressed to God:* "And You are this, O Lord our God" (P 3). The "this" picks up reference from the immediately preceding sentence: "Something than which a greater cannot be conceived exists so truly, therefore, that it cannot be conceived not to exist." In this second address to God, therefore, Anselm is identifying God with *G.* On the basis of this identification Anselm draws the conclusion that God cannot be conceived not to exist—since this has just been demonstrated to hold of *G:* "You, therefore, so truly exist, O Lord my God, that You cannot be conceived not to exist." Here, once again, we certainly find an identification of *G* and God, but no argument for it. Once again, we seem to have a profession of faith.[27]

Anselm, however, immediately follows this with two considerations that are meant to support it. The first is the following comment on the claim that God cannot be conceived not to exist: "And this is how things deserve to be [*et merito*]. For if any mind could conceive of something better than You, the creature would rise above the creator, and would pass judgement on the creator—which is totally absurd."[28] This, however, is again a profession of belief, and hardly an argument. The absurdity in question is a religious absurdity.[29] What now follows, however, may be thought to constitute an argument: "Indeed, whatever there is, except You alone, can be conceived not to exist."[30] With the help of this premise, it is possible to construct a proof of God's existence from the second and third chapters of the *Proslogion.* The argument would go as follows: Something exists that cannot be conceived not to exist; everything other than God can be conceived not to exist; therefore God exists. The first premise is the upshot of a

train of argument that was concerned solely with *G,* and so was meant to be acceptable even to the Fool. What, however, of the second? Anselm gives no argument for it in *Proslogion III.* There are, however, several passages in the *Reply* to Gaunilo, as we shall see, in which Anselm argues that anything that has a beginning or an end, or has parts (including temporal parts), or is spatially circumscribed, can be conceived not to exist. Anselm presents this as an exhaustive list of the conditions that allow a thing to be conceived as nonexistent. Moreover, these passages are purely "philosophical" in character. So, if it can be shown that God alone cannot conceivably meet any of these conditions, He alone cannot be conceived not to exist, and the argument for God's existence will be complete. Not only, however, does Anselm never present this argument; how might he have thought that he could convince someone without faith, such as the Fool, of this crucial last thesis: that God cannot be conceived not to exist? Of course, if God is something than which a greater cannot be conceived, Anselm could doubtless argue, on purely "rational" grounds, that God cannot conceivably meet any of the conditions, because this is greater than conceivably meeting any of them. But this just brings us round in a circle to the identification of God with *G* that is the very point at issue. I find nothing in Anselm's work to conflict with Barth's reading of the situation: "How do we know that God's real Name is *quo maius cogitari nequit* [sc. *G*]? We know it because that is how God has revealed himself and because we believe him as he has revealed himself" (Barth 1960: 152).

But surely, it may be objected, if the Fool understands *G,* and has now been brought to see that *G* exists, his only shortcoming is that he merely does not understand the *word* "God." This could be easily rectified. We simply inform the Fool that "God" is a term for *G.* Matters were not so simple for Anselm, however. In *Proslogion IV* Anselm states that a person can be said to be thinking of something if either of two different states of affairs obtains. First, when a word signifying the thing is thought. Second, when the very thing itself is understood *(id ipsum quod res est intelligitur).* The Fool thinks of God only in the first way. Because of this, the Fool does not properly understand *(bene intelligit)* that God is that than which a greater cannot be conceived. Can it really be thought that Anselm was of the opinion that the Fool could be brought to such a proper understanding by being induced to follow a certain linguistic rule: namely, that "God" is to be used to refer to *G?* What *understanding* would this involve? "God is *G*" would, for the Fool, be a trivial tautology.

The strongest piece of evidence against this suggestion, however, comes from Anselm's procedure in the *Monologion*. Just as in the *Proslogion* Anselm proves that *G* exists and then identifies God with *G,* so in the *Monologion* Anselm proves the existence of a "supreme essence" and finally identifies this essence with God. In the earlier work, Anselm writes seventy-nine chapters in which God is not so much as mentioned. In these chapters Anselm is concerned, rather, to prove that various things must hold of a supreme essence. Only in the final chapter is God mentioned and identified with the supreme essence. The grounds that Anselm offers are instructive. He ties an understanding of what "God" properly means to *worship* and *prayer.* The sense of "God" is given as being that which, because of its supreme excellence and the dominion that it exercises over all that happens, ought to be worshipped and entreated. Now, according to the *Proslogion,* the Fool understands *something than which a greater cannot be conceived.* Anselm also thinks that the Fool can be brought to accept that such a thing actually exists. Would this, however, be enough to bring the Fool to his knees in, as Anselm puts it, loving veneration and venerating love (M 80)? Even if the Fool can be led through the course of reasoning that leads to the conclusion that *G* (or the "supreme essence" of the *Monologion*) is the utterly supreme being who creates and controls all things, would the Fool necessarily, thereby, have been brought to the belief that this ought to be worshipped and entreated? It is far from clear that Anselm would have thought so; and it is far from clear that he would have been wrong. But if not, it seems, the Fool will still lack an understanding of God in Anselm's eyes. That God is something than which a greater cannot be conceived is not only, for Anselm, a religious insight; it is the beginning, and not the end, of his quest to understand the nature of God. I think it fairly clear that Anselm believed that such an exploration would be into an understanding specifically of *God* only if informed and guided by faith. I am not suggesting that Anselm was a "Wittgensteinian fideist" *avant la lettre.*[31] But the suggestion that Anselm held that *God* is an essentially religious notion (if "notion" is an appropriate term), that religion is essentially a matter of worship and prayer, and that such an "engaged" existential orientation cannot be generated purely out of assent to a bunch of "propositions" that can be impartially assessed by any "reasonable" person is one that should be taken seriously.

In the rest of the present work I shall, however, ignore this issue. As I have mentioned, more or less all philosophers who discuss the Ontological

Argument today, in any of its forms, accept that to prove that *G* exists would be to prove that God, or at least something divine, exists. This is, indeed, the view of almost all who have discussed Anselm from the Middle Ages to the present day. I can think of no one who has objected that, even if Anselm's arguments worked, they would at most prove the existence of *G,* and not of God. In case the equation of *G* and God is not self-evident, the case can be filled out by a principle that Anselm himself enunciates: that *G,* by its very nature, must be "whatever it is better [and hence, for Anselm, greater] to be than not to be" (P 5). When we start piling up the "great-making" characteristics that this principle mandates, we shall soon arrive at a characterization that few would deny suffices to constitute the divine nature.[32] I shall go along with this *for the purposes of the present work,* though I am acutely sensitive to the fact both that big questions, and not just "philosophical" questions, are being thereby sidelined, and also that, arguably, the whole tenor of Anselm's thought is not being properly respected. The real purpose of the present work is philosophical. It is to direct attention to an argument for the existence of God that, from a philosophical perspective, deserves more attention than it has received. I believe that this argument lurks in the writings of Anselm, so that a just appreciation of Anselm's thought is an important ingredient of the project. The ultimate goal, however, lies beyond Anselm. On the other hand, there are many relevant things, perhaps the most important things, that lie beyond this book.

1

THE MODAL ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

I propose to begin our investigation of the Modal Ontological Argument with Norman Malcolm, since, as I mentioned in the Introduction, it was he who brought this form of argument for God's existence to the general attention of the contemporary philosophical world. Like all versions of the modal form of the Ontological Argument, Malcolm's hinges on the claim that God could only exist non-contingently: that is to say, with logical (or "metaphysical": i.e., *absolute*) necessity.[1] Malcolm, of course, based his own argument on Anselm, and he characterizes Anselm as making two claims: "First, that a being whose nonexistence is logically impossible is 'greater' than a being whose nonexistence is logically possible . . . ; second, that *God* is a being than which a greater cannot be conceived" (Malcolm 1960: 45). Malcolm endorses both of these claims, and therefore concludes that non-contingent existence must be ascribed to God—on the grounds of the Anselmian principle that, since nothing greater than God can be conceived, we must attribute to Him everything that it is better or greater to be than not to be (P 5).[2] Believers in God, in any case, generally do not believe that He merely "happens" to exist. Moreover, the sense of necessity implied looks as if it is not mere causal necessity, for then God's existence would be dependent upon something else: upon at least certain causal laws, perhaps. Suppose we accepted this. Where would that get us? At one point Malcolm sums up his argument as follows:

> What Anselm has proved is that the notion of contingent existence or of contingent non-existence cannot have any application to God. His existence must either be logically necessary or logically impossible. The only intelligible way of rejecting Anselm's claim that God's existence is necessary is to maintain that the concept of God, as a being a

> greater than which cannot be conceived, is self-contradictory or nonsensical. Supposing that this is false, Anselm is right to deduce God's necessary existence from his characterization of Him as a being a greater than which cannot be conceived (Malcolm 1960: 49).

The correctness of the inference made in the first two sentences of this passage may not be immediately apparent. If God cannot exist contingently, it may be thought, all that follows is that if God did exist, He would exist necessarily—not that He actually does. In fact, however, given certain qualifications to be noted shortly, Malcolm's inference is sound. This is perhaps best shown, in a way that is now standard, by presenting the Modal Ontological Argument as a formally valid argument in modal logic—an approach first presented by Charles Hartshorne (1962: 50–1).[3]

The simplest presentation of the argument in this style has two premises. The first concerns the non-contingency of divine existence. As we saw in the Introduction, the best way to avoid the suspicion that in proposing such non-contingency one is bizarrely writing God into existence is to express the claim in a Kantian, conditional form: If God were to exist, He would exist non-contingently, or necessarily.[4] For the time being, let us accept this as a partial spelling out of the concept of God.[5] If it is, it is an a priori necessary truth. So let us explicitly signal this fact, and take the following as our first premise: Necessarily, if God exists, He exists necessarily.[6] The second premise is to the effect that it is possible that God, so understood, should exist. From these two premises it is, with certain qualifications to be noted soon, possible to prove that God actually exists. Here is an informal presentation of the matter.[7]

The most intuitive way of getting a grip on modal arguments is to understand them in terms of "possible worlds": all the ways things could possibly have been together with the actual world (as the way things actually are).[8] On this approach a proposition's being necessarily true is thought of as its being true *at all possible worlds.* A proposition's being possibly true is thought of as its being true *at one possible world* (at least). A proposition is contingently true just in case it is actually true, but false at some possible world. A proposition is contingent *simpliciter* just in case it is true at some possible world (perhaps not the actual one) and false at some possible world. The analogous glosses for false propositions are obvious. On this approach the claim that God exists necessarily is construed as the claim that the proposition *God exists* is true at every possible world. Similarly, the claim

that God possibly exists is construed as the claim that the proposition that God exists is true at some possible world or other.

The first premise of the argument states that it is *necessary* that if God exists, He exists necessarily: that is, that this conditional is true at every possible world. So, if God does exist in some possible world, He exists necessarily in that possible world: that is, the proposition that He exists necessarily is true at that possible world. The second premise has it that God's existence is at least possible: in other words, He exists in at least one possible world. So, from the previous consideration, it follows that the proposition that *God exists necessarily* is true in at least some possible world. But if in that possible world God exists *necessarily,* He exists in the actual world—since to exist necessarily is to exist in *all* possible worlds, the actual one included. Moreover, God exists necessarily in the actual world, since, as we have just seen, in virtue of existing necessarily in some possible world He exists in *all* possible worlds.

Some will find the above argument objectionable because of the way in which it treats "God" as a proper name or singular term. An argument for the existence of God cannot, of course, simply assume that the term "God" actually refers to anything; and many object to the employment of possibly empty singular terms in serious arguments. One way to avoid this problem is to replace reference to God with reference to a certain (possible, or possibly instantiated) *kind* of being. Hartshorne's choice is a *perfect being.*[9] His argument has as its first premise the claim that necessarily, if a perfect being exists, it is necessary that a perfect being exists: something that he dubs "Anselm's Principle" (Hartshorne 1962: 51). At first sight this Principle may seem not to capture properly what Hartshorne takes to have been Anselm's insight: namely, that a perfect being cannot exist contingently. All that his Principle explicitly states is that, necessarily, if a perfect being exists, then, necessarily, *some perfect being or other* exists. This does not capture the idea that if there is a perfect being in some possible world, *it* exists necessarily (in virtue of being perfect). All that the Modal Ontological Argument with Hartshorne's premise may seem to allow us to infer is that there is some perfect being or other in every possible world—though perhaps a different one in each. The genuine Anselmian insight, if that is what it is, certainly entails Hartshorne's premise; and the argument with his premise validly leads to the existence of a perfect being. It would, however, be much better to track the modal and metaphysical facts more accurately by expressing Anselm's "insight" more faithfully.

In fact, Hartshorne's procedure is not open to the foregoing criticism, because of a further claim he makes. He claims that "perfection characterizes a unique individual, rather than a class of possible perfect beings" (1962: 62). What he means by this is not merely that at most one divine being can exist, but that if in any two possible worlds there is a perfect being, it is the *same* perfect being that exists in them.[10] Hartshorne may be right about this; indeed, I believe he is. In order to show this, however, one must appeal to some highly controversial metaphysical principles. In order to keep things relatively straightforward at this stage, I shall for the sake of argument allow that there could be more than one perfect being in a single possible world. In order to retrieve Anselm's "insight," I propose to modify "Anselm's Principle" so that it reads: Necessarily, if a perfect being exists, *it* necessarily exists. Finally, since we all know that the Modal Ontological Argument is supposed to be a proof of God's existence, I shall replace Hartshorne's "perfect" explicitly with "divine."

When we move from talking about "God" to talking about "a divine being" a certain complication arises. We cannot deduce that a divine being actually exists from the following two premises: *necessarily, if a divine being exists, it exists necessarily,* and *it is possible that a divine being should exist.* From these premises we can prove that the possible divine being actually exists, but we cannot prove that this being is actually divine. In other words, the proof will leave open the possibility of a being that is divine and yet not essentially so.[11] This supposed possibility is no doubt absurd: for it amounts to the idea that something non-divine could have been divine. Nevertheless, this "possibility" needs to be excluded if our argument is to be logically cogent. We can do this by explicitly writing into our first premise the traditional thesis that God, or a divine being, is *essentially* divine. We then get the following: Necessarily, if a divine being exists, it exists necessarily and is necessarily divine. This, together with the premise that it is possible for a divine being to exist, allows us to prove that a divine being actually exists. For the reasons indicated, it will not allow us to prove that *only one* divine being exists. The traditional literature is, however, replete with arguments to the effect that at most one divine being is possible—not only within any world but across all worlds. We could subsequently appeal to such arguments to attempt to remedy this shortcoming of the present argument, if that is what it is. For the time being a proof that *a* divine being exists will be proof enough.[12]

Here is an informal proof of the argument.[13] The first premise tells us that if there is a divine being in any possible world, the proposition that

that being exists is necessarily true at that world. By the second premise we know that there is a divine being in at least one possible world. Hence, we can conclude that the proposition that this divine being exists is necessarily true at this world. If there are two or more divine beings in this world, the propositions that assert of each that it exists are both or all necessarily true—as are the corresponding propositions at other worlds that may contain other possible divine beings. Consider just one divine being in the world in question. Since the proposition that asserts the existence of this being is *necessarily* true at that world, this divine being exists in the actual world—and, indeed, in all possible worlds. Moreover, this being will be divine in the actual world, since, by the first premise, it is necessarily divine. If it is possible for more than one divine being to exist, either in the same world or in different worlds, then they all exist, exist necessarily, and are necessarily (and, hence, actually) divine.

I said above that, with qualifications, it is possible in modal logic to prove that God (or a divine being) exists. We have now seen the proofs. It is time for the qualifications. They arise from the fact that there are various systems of modal logic. The system that I have tacitly employed above is the strongest modal system there is. It is known as S5. This system has as an axiom the claim that if something is possible, it is necessarily possible: or, equivalently, that *if something is possibly necessary, it is necessary.* It is this, and this alone, that allows us immediately to infer from the fact that a divine being exists necessarily in some possible world (i.e., that it is *possible* that such a being should exist *necessarily*) that it actually does exist necessarily.[14] Now, the fact that S5 is such a strong system may not by itself be a matter of concern, since the vast majority of philosophers regard S5 as enshrining our understanding of absolute possibility and necessity. Nathan Salmon (1982: 230–252 and 1989), however, developing ideas in Hugh Chandler (1976), has presented an argument to the effect that S5 (and even the weaker modal system S4) are so strong that they misrepresent our understanding of metaphysical modality. The argument in question presupposes the truth of the doctrine of the necessity of origin, as famously propounded by Saul Kripke (1972)—a doctrine that I do not propose to contest. To illustrate the argument, suppose I make a table top, T, by cutting it out of a much larger piece of wood. Most people believe that I could not have made that very table top from a completely different piece of wood—even from a completely different section of the larger piece of wood in question. There is, however, a certain tolerance. Surely I could have made T from a slightly different portion of the larger piece of wood. Suppose that I actually

make T by sawing across the large piece of wood at two places, producing a chunk of wood W_0 that constitutes T. Surely it would have been T that I made if I had made the two cuts just an inch to the left, resulting in a slightly different chunk of wood W_1. For the sake of argument, let an inch be the limit of tolerance.[15] In other words, if the cuts had been made more than an inch up or down the larger piece of wood, it would (necessarily) not have been T that was made.[16] Now suppose that I *had* made T out of W_1. If so, I then *could have* made it from a yet slightly different chunk of wood W_2 that lies another inch up to the left: that is, within the limits of tolerance *as it applies in that situation*. W_2, however, will exceed the limits of tolerance for T *given how it was actually made,* for it will be more than an inch different from W_0. This invalidates S4. The "characteristic axiom" of S4, that which distinguishes it from weaker modal systems, is the thesis that if something is necessary, it is necessary that it is necessary: or, equivalently, that *if something is possibly possible, it is possible*. But our table top invalidates this. Although it is, as things actually stand, not a possibility that T should have been made from W_2, being made from W_2 is a *possible* possibility for T. This is because T's being made from W_2 is a possibility with respect to something that is a possibility for our actual T: namely, being made from W_1.[17] If this example invalidates S4, which it seems to, it also invalidates S5, since the latter incorporates the former.[18]

One response to this problem, at least as far as the Modal Ontological Argument is concerned, would be to point out that Salmon's counterexample to S5 is the only remotely plausible one that anyone has come up with, and it is difficult to think of another (that differs in principle). Before this, almost everyone regarded S5 as the best system for formally representing our understanding of absolute necessity. In other words, all the inferences that S5 sustains remain wholly justified and reasonable *except for Salmon's sort of case.* This sort of case is, however, irrelevant to the claims and inferences that are made in the Modal Ontological Argument. Limits of tolerance hardly apply to a divine being. At least in the area that is of concern to us, S5 seems beyond reproach. There is, moreover, a second possible response. There is a system of modal logic that is weaker than S5, and independent of S4, that sustains the Modal Ontological Argument. The system in question is known as "B," or the *Brouwerian* system, after the logician L. E. J. Brouwer. Its "characteristic axiom" is the claim that if something is actually the case, it is necessarily possible that it be the case: or, equivalently, that if something is possibly necessary, it is actually the case. This modal system allows us to infer from the possibility of a divine being

necessarily existing that it actually exists (whereas the stronger system S5 would allow us to infer immediately that it exists *necessarily*). Although this weaker conclusion may seem conclusion enough, it is of course weaker than the conclusion that proponents of the Modal Ontological Argument (and, perhaps, Anselm himself) wished to arrive at: namely, that God (or a divine being) exists *necessarily*. However, when we put the weaker conclusion together with "Anselm's Principle" that, necessarily, if a divine being exists, it exists necessarily, which is enshrined in our first premise, we can infer such a thing's necessary existence from its actual existence. So, ultimately, nothing is lost.[19] The significance of the existence of the modal system B in the present context is that Salmon (1989: 4, 29) admits that he cannot think of an objection to it that parallels his objection to S4 and S5. Neither can I.[20]

The Modal Ontological Argument in at least one of its forms is valid. Is it, however, sound? Does it really prove the existence of God, or a divine being?[21] It does if its two premises are true; and most people will be inclined to accept both. On the other hand, most people are also inclined to accept another claim: that it is possible that God should *not* exist. If, however, we put this together with "Anselm's Principle," we can by modal reasoning parallel to the above prove that God does *not* exist: indeed, that He *necessarily* does not exist! What modal logic alone in effect tells us is that the following three propositions form an inconsistent triad:

> Necessarily, if God exists, He exists necessarily.
> It is possible that God should exist
> It is possible that God should not exist.

Logic tells us that we must reject (at least) one of these propositions, since any two together entail the negation of the third. Logic does not tell us which to reject. Still, reject one we must; and when push comes to shove it is pretty clear which of the three most people are going to reject. It is the first.[22] Is it really true that *logically necessary* existence is part of our conception of God? When people allow that it is possible that God should exist, are they really allowing the possibility of a logically necessary being?

Before exploring this matter let us briefly consider the last member of this inconsistent triad: the thesis that it is possible that God should not exist. Most people would doubtless be willing to assert this when prompted.

There is, however, a case for suggesting that such responses would often be inappropriate. This is because it is easy in many contexts to confuse an "epistemic" with a "metaphysical" sense of possibility. Many people—at the very least all non-believers, and hence all to whom an argument such as the present one is directed—will hold it to be an epistemic possibility that God does not exist: that is, that for all we know God may not actually exist. Perhaps it is this that many assertions of the "possibility" of God's non-existence would express. Such an epistemic notion of possibility is, however, irrelevant to the Modal Ontological Argument. The only relevant responses are those to the following unambiguous question: "Suppose that God really does exist. Could He have failed to?" My strong hunch is that far fewer people would affirm this. Be this as it may, such an affirmation is ruled out if the first member of the triad is accepted: that if God exists, He exists *necessarily*. This justifies us in focusing on this proposition at this stage. Obviously, the dialectic I have just sketched works only for those who accept that the existence of a divine being is at least possible ("metaphysically"): that is, for those who accept the second member of the triad. But those who reject the very possibility of God's existence should not be wasting their time considering an argument such as the present one—or reading this book. They need to be addressed on a different level.

So, to return to the first member of our inconsistent triad: Is it really acceptable to claim that if God existed, He would exist of logical necessity? One reason to doubt this is that many have held that the very notion of a logically necessary being is incoherent. J. N. Findlay (1948), indeed, proposed an ontological *disproof* of God's existence based on this very point. Findlay endorsed "Anselm's Principle" in the sense that he argued that an adequate object of worship can only be a logically necessary being. He then concluded that since the notion of a logically necessary being is incoherent, theism is (necessarily) false. Most of the theists who responded to Findlay's challenge did so by claiming that logically necessary existence is no part of the traditional concept of God; and I do not think they did so simply because Findlay had forced them into a corner. John Hick, in particular, argued in some detail that existing by logical necessity is no part of either the biblical witness or the thought of the major theologians. There is, to be sure, some sense in which a believer does not hold that God simply *happens* to exist. Hick therefore put forward the notion of "factual necessity" to do justice to this genuine element in theistic belief.[23] A being is factually necessary in Hick's sense if it is eternal (or at least sempiternal), indestructible, and incorruptible.[24] Hick (1961: 732–3) sees these attributes as following

from the more basic attribute of *aseity:* the impossibility of being caused to exist.[25] Hick claims that this notion of factual necessity allows one to reject the suggestion that God, if He exists, merely happens to exist. This is because, when we say that something merely happens to be the case, we mean that if other things had been different, it would not have been the case. This will never be true in relation to an ontologically independent, *a se* being.[26] Many have thought that Hick has here offered a more plausible alternative to "Anselm's Principle."

In case it is not obvious, perhaps I should point out that if we substitute "factual" for "logical" necessity in the Modal Ontological Argument, it will grind to a halt. "Anselm's Principle" will be replaced by the claim that necessarily, if a divine being exists, it exists with factual necessity.[27] Together with the claim that it is (logically) possible for a divine being to exist, we can derive the conclusion that there is a possible world in which a divine being exists of factual necessity. What follows from this with respect to the actual world? Nothing at all of any interest. We need logical (or absolute) necessity to "get us back" to the actual world from some logically possible other world. This is because the "worlds" in question are specified in terms of this latter kind of necessity—a necessity that is, as Hick himself insists, different in kind from factual necessity.[28]

The fact that logically necessary existence may not be an ingredient in the traditional conception of God is not, however, of decisive importance from a philosophical point of view. Some people—such as Malcolm, Hartshorne, and Findlay—do claim that existing of logical necessity is part of their concept of God. What is to be said to them? What is to be said to those who hold that to exist with absolute necessity is greater than to exist otherwise? Alternatively, we can perhaps just *stipulate* that the kind of divine being we are concerned with is one that is essentially divine *and exists with absolute necessity* when it exists. The only way to block the Modal Ontological Argument would then be to claim that such a being is *impossible*—logically impossible. Findlay (and a host of others at the time) argued just this; and Hick concurred. The arguments that were presented at that time—and we are talking about the mid-twentieth century, when a mix of lukewarm Logical Positivism and lukewarm Wittgensteinianism ruled the day—now seem dated and questionable, however. More bluntly, they were mistaken. In particular, the equation of (or at least the supposed mutual entailment between) the necessary, the analytic, and the a priori, which fuelled much of the polemic, is now known to be false.[29] Moreover, the idea that something could exist of absolute necessity no longer appears as outlandish as it

formerly did.[30] For one thing, there are a considerable number of "Platonists" about numbers and other abstract entities around. These people believe that such entities really do exist, and that they exist necessarily. The blanket denial of the possibility of a necessary existent will have to show that such Platonism is itself incoherent: not a trivial undertaking. God, of course, is not in any interesting sense like a number. So perhaps there is something incoherent about God existing of logical necessity. But if so, this needs to be shown. It is not shown by the poor arguments of half a century ago.

Are there other arguments that cast doubt on the possibility of a necessary divine being? I know of only one that I regard as worthy of consideration.[31] I suggested above that even if existing of absolute necessity is not a usual part of one's conception of God, one could stipulate that it is to be. The term "stipulate" is, however, a hostage to fortune. For why could one not stipulate that necessary existence is part of certain other notions that one could devise, and run a Modal Ontological Argument for beings answering to all of these notions? As Michael Tooley (1981: 424) points out, for any predicate "P" we can introduce a predicate "is maximally P," where something is maximally P if and only if it exists in all possible worlds and is P in every world. If one accepts that it is logically possible for a being to be maximally P, we can prove that a P-type being exists (and exists necessarily) in a way that matches the Modal Ontological Argument. What grounds could one have for questioning the possibility of such beings that will not raise a question against the possibility of a necessarily existent divine being? This constitutes a "Gaunilo style" objection to the Modal Ontological Argument in that it shows that the argument proves far too much.[32] Will it not prove, to take one of Tooley's more extreme examples, the existence of a maximal wombat? Even more worryingly, some of the beings whose existence would thereby be demonstrated would be incompatible with the existence of God—such as, to use another of Tooley's examples, a maximally evil Devil.

Defenders of the Modal Ontological Argument must clearly reject the logical possibility of all such other candidates; and this is in fact what they have consistently done. Anselm himself makes it abundantly clear that God *alone* can be conceived to be something that cannot be conceived not to exist; and Charles Hartshorne devotes page after page emphasizing the modal equivalent of this. But how may such a stand be justified? It can only be done on the basis of substantive metaphysical considerations (as both Anselm and Hartshorne clearly recognized). As soon as we get into

the territory of metaphysics, however, issues become deeply controversial, so that defending "Anselm's Principle" along these lines will be far from straightforward.

Suppose, however, that the Gaunilo-style objection can be deflected (as I believe it can). Where does that leave us? That something cannot be shown to be impossible does not, of course, imply that it is possible. It does mean that it is epistemically possible: possible for all we know. Our judgment on the Modal Ontological Argument, thus far, should therefore be that it is epistemically possible that it is sound, and hence that it is epistemically possible that God exists. But this is no news to anyone.[33] Are there, on the other hand, any positive considerations that favour the possibility of a necessarily existent God? Leibniz famously claimed that the Ontological Argument is incomplete as normally formulated, but that it would be rendered cogent if the possibility of God's existence could be demonstrated. He attempted such a proof on several occasions.[34] His proofs always have the same basic character. Leibniz argued that all the essential divine attributes are simple, positive qualities, that all such qualities are compossible, and that therefore a being possessing all the essential divine attributes (i.e., God) is possible. Even supposing that such a proof works, it will be relevant to the Modal Ontological Argument only if the divine attributes in question entail necessary existence—for only then will a *necessary* being (with all the other divine attributes) be shown to be possible. Leibniz never attempted such a demonstration; and it is wholly unclear how it would go.

I have mentioned Leibniz because considerable interest has been shown of late in Kurt Gödel's (1995: 403–4, 429–437) version of the Modal Ontological Argument: an argument that prominently features a Leibniz-style proof of the compossibility of all "positive" properties. Although much logical acumen has been displayed by several authors in emending and developing Gödel's proof, none of it touches the philosophical problem we are currently engaged with.[35] This is because Gödel's original proof, together with all but one of its progeny, asserts as an unsupported axiom that necessary existence is a positive property. This simply assumes, rather than demonstrates, that it is possible for a being that qualifies as divine (in virtue of possessing various other "positive" properties) to exist necessarily. The one exception is an argument due to Robert Maydole (1980 and 2003). His argument, however, relies on what is known as the "Barcan Formula" being a necessary truth. The Barcan Formula states that if it is possible for something to be *F,* there actually is something that is possibly *F.* This is

widely and correctly regarded as *not* a necessary truth.[36] In the present connection, the Barcan Formula would commit someone who held that although a divine being does not exist, one might have, to the view that something that actually exists *might have been divine*. But that is silly. Maydole does, it is true, spend some time trying to defend the Barcan Formula; but his defence, and especially his response to the obvious counter-examples, is wholly unconvincing.

In his original article Norman Malcolm presented a line of thought that can be read as constituting an argument for the logical possibility of a logically necessary divine being.[37] In particular it can be construed as an argument to the effect that a being that possesses the generally accepted divine attributes can only exist of logical necessity. The attributes that are initially of relevance are the impossibility of coming into and going out of existence: "Since He cannot come into existence, if He does not exist His existence is impossible. If He does exist He cannot have come into existence . . . nor can He cease to exist . . . So if God exists His existence is necessary." (Malcolm 1960: 49).[38] As was pointed by a number of writers soon after the appearance of Malcolm's article—for example, Plantinga (1961: 95)—these inferences are invalid as they stand. For example, all that immediately follows from the impossibility of God coming into existence, together with the thesis that God does not exist, is the conclusion that God does not exist and never will (in any possible continuation of this world)—not that His existence is absolutely impossible.

Although the inferences are unconvincing as they stand, Malcolm attempted to bolster them by two other theses.[39] The first is that if anything exists contingently, its existence is characterized by duration rather than eternity, and that duration is incompatible with divine existence.[40] Now, the term "eternity" is used in two different senses. Sometimes it expresses *timelessness*. If God is eternal in this sense, He is not "in" time at all: He does not persist "through" time, even incessantly. His existence, in the famous phrase of Boethius, is *tota simul:* all at once.[41] This is the traditional sense of eternity—one to which Anselm, as we shall see, certainly subscribed.[42] Eternity is sometimes, however, understood as *omnitemporal* existence. An eternal being in this sense is indeed in time, but there is no time when it does not exist. In order to do justice to the idea, shared by all parties, that eternity involves boundless infinity, on this second conception time itself is regarded as infinite in extent, both forwards into the future and backwards into the past.[43] Following common usage, I shall term om-

nitemporal existence in such infinite time *sempiternity*.[44] It is not entirely clear which of these two forms of eternity Malcolm attributes to God. On the one hand, he writes that "eternity does not mean endless duration," and that it does not "make sense" to raise questions such as "How long has He existed?" in relation to God. On the other hand, he characterizes endless duration as duration that is *contingently* endless (Malcolm 1960: 48), so that eternity by implication would seem to be equivalent to (or at least compatible with) essential sempiternity.[45] In order to assess Malcolm's first thesis we need to consider both ways of interpreting eternity.

Suppose that by "eternity" Malcolm does not mean timelessness, but merely essential sempiternity. So construed, Malcolm's first thesis seems false—or at least in severe need of justification. Why, it may be asked, could an essentially sempiternal being not exist merely contingently?[46] Necessarily, indeed, such a being does not cease to exist or begin to exist; but it does not follow from this that such a being's existence is absolutely necessary. At least we need some argument to this effect, and Malcolm provides none. Suppose, however, that by "eternity" Malcolm means timelessness. Then he would be claiming that an essentially timeless being cannot exist contingently. This has much to be said for it, since the standard examples of timelessly existing beings that are offered by people who believe in them are abstract entities such as numbers, sets, universals, propositions, and the like. Many, of course, refuse to "countenance" such entities. But those who do—"Platonists," as they are often called—typically regard such entities as necessary existents. Malcolm's first thesis so construed faces two problems. The first is that those who believe in God's timelessness do not regard Him as an abstract entity. The inference from the necessary existence of the latter to that of the former may therefore be felt to be in need of some justification. This can, perhaps, be provided. Some "Platonists" believe that abstract entities are necessary existents precisely because of their atemporal nature. Even if God is similar to such entities *only* in that neither He nor they are temporal, this may be enough to support the inference to His necessary existence. The second problem is more serious, however. It is simply that despite the overwhelming consensus of traditional thought on this matter, the idea that God is to be conceived as a timeless being is now widely rejected—by both theists and atheists alike.[47] Many reject the coherence of the notion of timeless beings altogether. Many of those who accept the idea in relation to abstract entities reject it in relation to God—so different, obviously, is God from, say, a number. Since this is hardly the place for an

investigation into the complex question of God's possible timelessness, I suggest that we set aside the first of Malcolm's two theses, since both ways of construing it lead to significant problems.

Malcolm's second thesis concerns the notion of dependence: "If we reflect on the common meaning of the word 'God' (no matter how vague and confused it is), we realize that it is incompatible with this meaning that God's existence should *depend* on anything" (Malcolm 1960: 46–7).[48] There are two sorts of dependency that Malcolm highlights as incompatible with divinity: being brought into existence by something, and depending on something in order to continue to exist. Most would accept this, since it is but a spelling out of what Hick termed "factual necessity." Malcolm then claims that "if you can conceive of a certain thing and this thing does not exist then . . . if the thing were to exist it would depend on other things both for coming into existence and continuing in existence" (Malcolm 1960: 48).[49] In this stretch of argument Malcolm is drawing on a passage from Anselm's *Reply* to Gaunilo—a passage in which, as Malcolm puts it, Anselm makes this "acute point." I agree that the point is acute. Indeed, it is at the heart of what I shall later present as Anselm's "other argument." It is, however, far from being clearly true. Indeed, many will regard it as obviously false. Most people who deny that God exists concede that there might have been a god. They therefore take God's existence (and nonexistence) to be contingent. Moreover, most of these people will agree that absolute ontological independence is an essential divine attribute. What is the problem, they will ask, in holding both that God might have existed (though He does not), and yet holding that if He did (contingently) exist, He would in no way be dependent upon anything else?[50] Malcolm does not address such questions; nor does he write anything in support of his controversial and perhaps implausible thesis: a thesis that in effect says that factual necessity entails logical necessity. Much more needs to be said, therefore, to justify this second thesis, and hence this entire way of trying to show the logical possibility of a logically necessary divine being. Note that I have not said that Malcolm's position is mistaken. It is simply that much more needs to be done in order to make a decision on the matter.

Overall there is, in my view, no direct decisive argument either for or against the possibility of a divine being that exists with absolute necessity. Perhaps, however, one can appeal to some reasonable notion of *presumption* in order to favour the possibility. After all, we tend to accept that something is possible unless we have a good case against it; whereas if it is suggested that something is necessary or impossible, we tend to ask why. In a

sane and balanced assessment of the situation on which I cannot improve, Robert Merrihew Adams (1988) concludes that the jury is out. Taken in and of itself, the claim that it is possible that a divine being should exist of necessity warrants neither our acceptance nor our dissent. Adams suggests that other considerations to which theists have appealed tip the balance in favour of the possibility. Hartshorne (1962: 52; 1967: 295) offered a similar assessment of the situation—and on the basis of this drew an inevitable conclusion, which can serve as the conclusion of the present chapter: "The [modal] ontological argument is not self-contained" (Hartshorne 1961: 473).

2

ANSELM'S UNDERSTANDING OF CONCEIVABILITY

If there is to be any hope of finding a version of the Modal Ontological Argument in Anselm's writings, some argument of Anselm's for the existence of God—or, at least, for the existence of *something than which a greater cannot be conceived* (which I am abbreviating as *"G"*)—must be taken as being concerned, at least implicitly, with what is and is not "logically" possible or necessary.[1] Both Malcolm and Hartshorne focus on various arguments Anselm offers in which he is explicitly concerned with what can and cannot *be thought*—or, as I shall usually put it, with what is and is not *conceivable*.[2] The argument of Anselm's that has been the centre of attention in this connection is one to be found in the first half of *Proslogion III*. As we shall see in Chapter 4, the question of how exactly one should translate the passage is a substantive one; but here it is in the well-known translation by M. J. Charlesworth:

> And certainly this being so truly exists that it cannot be even thought not to exist. For something can be thought to exist that cannot be thought not to exist, and this is greater than that which can be thought not to exist. Hence, if that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought not to exist, then that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not the same as that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, which is absurd. Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists so truly then, that it cannot be even thought not to exist.

According to Hartshorne (1965: 88), Anselm is here offering "a new premise (two premises really): that we can conceive of necessary existence, and that this is superior to nonnecessary existence." By "necessary existence" Harts-

horne means "logically necessary existence" as he makes clear. Malcolm (1960: 45) similarly claims that here Anselm "is saying . . . that a being whose nonexistence is logically impossible is 'greater' than a being whose nonexistence is logically possible." Neither Malcolm nor Hartshorne offers any justification for an interpretation of Anselm's reference to what can and cannot be thought in terms of logical possibility and impossibility—the "modal interpretation" as I shall call it. They seem to take it as obvious that this is what Anselm "is saying." Not only is this not obvious, the majority of recent commentators on Anselm have rejected any such suggestion. If this majority view is correct, the idea that a Modal Ontological Argument is to be found in Anselm would be all but totally undermined from the start.[3] Although I shall eventually reject the suggestion that a Modal Ontological Argument is to be found anywhere, even implicitly, in Anselm's writings, I believe that this weight of scholarly opinion is mistaken. The "modal interpretation" of Anselm is correct; and the burden of this chapter is to demonstrate that this is the case. If it is, the suggestion that a Modal Ontological Argument for God's existence is to be found at least implicitly in Anselm will not, at least, have been undermined *ab initio*.[4]

Before proceeding, I should specify what I take the modal interpretation of Anselm to involve. When Malcolm claims that in the premise of the *Proslogion III* argument Anselm is saying that a being whose nonexistence is logically impossible is greater than a being whose nonexistence is logically possible, he could be taken as claiming that when Anselm writes that something cannot be thought, he simply means that the thing is logically impossible. Whether Malcolm actually intended this or not, it is untenable, and I wish to dissociate the modal interpretation from it at the outset. As I mentioned in the Introduction, for Anselm, and indeed for us, the notion of what can be thought, or of what is conceivable, has an essential epistemic aspect that is entirely lacking in the modal notions of possibility and impossibility. It is important to state this at the outset, since a number of critics of the modal interpretation have saddled it with the thesis that the two notions are completely identical for Anselm. All that the modal interpretation requires, however, is that, for Anselm, necessarily, something is inconceivable only if it is absolutely impossible, and conceivable only if it is absolutely possible. The modal interpretation is to be regarded as making explicit something that Anselm's own language strictly implies. Moreover, it is no essential part of this interpretation that Anselm was explicitly aware of this implication. It may be that he did not explicitly recognize the notions of absolute necessity and possibility as such, but had a "feel" for them

only as they are implicitly contained in his understanding of conceivability, of what can and cannot be "thought." What is essential to the modal interpretation is that Anselm's employment of the language of conceivability *conform to* the modal notions in the sense that he would claim something to be inconceivable *when and only when*—or, perhaps, *because and only because*—it is absolutely impossible. One can find four arguments in the literature against this modal interpretation of Anselm. The present chapter will review and refute these arguments, and then turn to a consideration of the positive evidence in favour of the interpretation.

The first argument against the modal interpretation of Anselm is due to Gareth Matthews. It is based on a passage in *Proslogion XV* where Anselm states that God is not only something than which a greater cannot be conceived, but is "something greater than can be conceived." According to Matthews (1961: 110) the modal interpretation of conceivability would, absurdly, have it that Anselm is here saying or implying that God is greater than is logically possible—in other words, that God is logically impossible! This argument has been endorsed by a significant number of recent commentators on Anselm.[5] Gregory Schufreider (1978: 44), indeed, describes Matthews's point as "decisive." Despite this I cannot myself see much in it. We should note, first, that Anselm's claim that God is greater than can be conceived should certainly not be construed as implying that God cannot be conceived. Matthews, perhaps, does not go this far; but Ermanno Bencivenga (1993: 97) does. He suggests that in a manner reminiscent of modern diagonal arguments for impossibility results, Anselm is arguing in the passage in question as follows: "I can think that there is something greater than anything I can think of, hence that, than which I can think of nothing greater, must be such that I can't think of it." Bencivenga goes on to suggest that Anselm retracts this claim in the *Reply* in response to Gaunilo. We need postulate no such retraction on Anselm's part, however, since Bencivenga's interpretation—"I can't think of it"—flies in the face of repeated assertions made by Anselm, even before his engagement with Gaunilo, that *G* can be conceived. Already in *Proslogion II* Anselm claimed that *G* at least exists "in the understanding" and is "understood," which implies that it can be conceived. Anselm goes on to claim that *G* can be *conceived to exist in reality* as well as in the understanding. Obviously, nothing can be conceived to exist in reality unless it can be conceived. Moreover, Anselm took himself and other true believers to be able to conceive and understand not just *G,* but *God,* at least to some extent. One of the first moves Anselm makes against Gaunilo is to insist that God can be both understood *(intelligitur)* and con-

ceived *(cogitatur);* and he calls upon Gaunilo to recognize that his own faith and self-knowledge *(conscientia)* testify to this fact (R 1). It is the faithless Fool who by contrast understands God not at all (R 7). Indeed, the Fool can conceive of God only in the paltry sense that he can conceive the *word* "God." Someone conceives God in a fuller, more authentic way only if the very reality itself is understood *(id ipsum quod res est intelligitur).* Someone who conceives or understands God in this way cannot conceive that God does not exist (P 4). But that, of course, is just Anselm's own situation. The simple fact is that for Anselm God is both greater than can be conceived, and yet conceived. The former in no way cancels or undermines the latter. Indeed, the very argument that Anselm gives for the former makes this very point: Anselm states that "something of this kind"—something that is greater than can be conceived—"can be conceived to exist" (P 15). In the traditional terminology, Anselm is not denying that God can be conceived, but that He can be *comprehended.* Anselm recognized that his conception and understanding of God is partial; but it is not negligible. It is, in particular, sufficient to sustain the reflections of the whole of the *Proslogion.* To suppose that because something is not wholly understood *(penitus intelligitur),* it is not understood at all, Anselm retorts to Gaunilo, is like supposing that someone who cannot gaze upon the full light of the sun cannot see light, although the latter is nothing other than the light of the sun (R 1).

Even so, in *Proslogion XV* Anselm is clearly saying that there is something about God—the depths of His power and greatness—that cannot be conceived. This, however, requires but a minor qualification to the thesis that for Anselm inconceivability implies impossibility. The sort of inconceivability that attaches to that which is *beyond* (human) thought or conception is different from the inconceivability that *conflicts* with thought (including human thought). The former indicates a certain lack of understanding; the latter precisely presupposes such understanding. Compare *God's inconceivable greatness* with *God's inconceivable malice.* The former surpasses the power of our intellect; the latter positively conflicts with, and hence is excluded by, it: excluded by what we *can* conceive. It is only an inconceivability that conflicts with understanding that is relevant for us, since it is only this notion that Anselm ever employs in his arguments for *G*'s existence. The modal interpretation remains intact, therefore, so long as we understand that the inconceivability it is concerned with is one that is repugnant to what the intellect understands, not one that transcends it.

The second argument is based on the fact that there are many occasions where Anselm *contrasts* "can" and "can be conceived." On one occasion, for

example, Anselm asserts that God cannot either exist or be conceived without power (EIV 7). An even more striking case is the following: "For if anyone should say that something than which a greater cannot be conceived is not something that exists in reality, or that it is able not to exist, *or even* that it can be conceived not to exist, he can easily be refuted" (R 5). In this passage we have three propositions that seem to be presented in order of deceasing strength; and Anselm claims that he can refute even the last and weakest claim that *G* can at least be conceived not to exist. That *G* does not exist, and that it is possible for *G* not to exist, are presented as stronger claims. Passages in which Anselm contrasts what is possible with what is possible "for the mind" (or for the understanding: *intellectu*) are even more common. Anselm claims, for example, that "whatever can be conceived and does not exist would, if it existed, be able not to exist either in reality or for the mind [*posset vel actu vel intellectu non esse*]" (R 1). I take it that being able not to exist "for the mind" means that the mind can conceive the thing's nonexistence. The only alternative would be that what Anselm is saying is that the thing in question could possibly not be conceived or thought of by anyone. This would be a most implausible suggestion, because Anselm immediately goes on to claim that the two possibilities he is concerned with "are foreign to You, than Whom nothing better can be conceived." Anselm nowhere suggests that not being thought of at all derogates from a thing's greatness.[6] Moreover, there is an analogous passage elsewhere that cannot be construed in the way suggested: "For whatever is made up of parts is not absolutely one . . . and it can be broken up either actually or by the mind [*vel actu vel intellectu dissolvi potest*]" (P 18; cf EIV 4). Here, obviously, it is an ability to *conceive* a thing as broken up that is in question. Elsewhere Anselm contrasts "cannot be" with "cannot be said to be" (M, 7). That the latter is effectively equivalent to, or at least implies, "cannot be conceived" is indicated by the immediately succeeding discussion, in which Anselm writes explicitly about what can be conceived.

So the evidence is clear. What, however, is it evidence for? Jonathan Barnes (1972: 23) claims that such passages show that "can" and "can be conceived" are not used by Anselm "with the same sense," and that Anselm rejected the idea that "logical impossibility and unimaginability are one and the same." Richard Campbell (1976: 105) similarly suggests that they render dubious the idea that for Anselm "the inconceivably otherwise and the logically necessary are the same." As I have already pointed out, however, the suggestion that "conceivable" means the same or has the same "sense" as "logically possible" is no part of the modal interpretation that is

to be defended here. All that is required is that they be mutually entailing. But the passages in question do not even show that they differ in meaning or sense. They would if (though only if) in the passages in question Anselm's explicitly modal language about what is and is not possible—about what "can" and "cannot" be the case—expressed the notion of absolute possibility. As we shall see later, it does not. It expresses, rather, a certain type of causal or natural necessity. It is surprising, therefore, to find both Barnes (1072: 24–5) and Campbell (1976: 109) agreeing that Anselm's explicit talk about what can and cannot be the case reflects a fairly standard mediaeval, ultimately Aristotelian understanding of these matters in terms of natural necessity, powers, and capacities. This is surprising, because if, in the passages we have been considering where Anselm contrasts conceivability and possibility, it is indeed such a sense of natural possibility that is in question, these passages are *wholly irrelevant* to the question of how conceivability relates to absolute (or "logical") possibility. Richard La Croix (1972: 52) does not make this mistake of Barnes and Campbell, but he does suggest that, given that Anselm employs the two distinct notions of not *possibly* not existing and not *conceivably* not existing, it is the former that should be given the logical modal reading, if anything in Anselm is to be so interpreted. La Croix gives no justification for this proposal; and it is simply bizarre. Indeed, La Croix goes on to argue against the suggestion without much difficulty—and then concludes that there is no notion of logical possibility in Anselm at all![7] If Anselm's explicit talk about what is possible expresses a non-logical causal sense of possibility, it is obviously Anselm's contrasting use of the notion of conceivability that is, if anything is, to be interpreted in terms of absolute necessity—just as Malcolm and Hartshorne suggested. Eileen Serene's (1980: 145) claim that because Anselm's "semantics for modalities" is so much at odds with modern modal logic, there is no chance that a Modal Ontological Argument is to be found even implicitly in Anselm, is to be discounted for a similar reason. If Anselm's understanding of the language of possibility and necessity (or, more usually, of what a thing "can" and "cannot" do or be) is—as we shall see in the following chapter that it indeed is—miles away from the modern modal approach, this not only casts no doubt on the suggestion that Anselm's use of the notion of *conceivability* involves some appreciation of logical modality, it provides support for this idea. For if it is indeed the case that in the passages where Anselm contrasts what is possible with what is conceivable it is a traditional, non-logical, causal sense of possibility that is operative, and if readers of Anselm at the time would naturally have so interpreted

them, then, if Anselm did want to express a notion of logical possibility and necessity, he would have chosen different language. The suggestion then naturally presents itself that it was precisely the language of conceivability that he employed to this end. This provides an answer to an objection by Gregory Schufreider to the suggestion that in *Proslogion III* and elsewhere Anselm's talk of what can be conceived (or "thought") even *implies* anything about logical possibility: "There is no need for Anselm, if he wants to show that something (necessarily) exists, to interpose the word 'thought' into the reasoning of [*Proslogion*] III. Instead, he could have argued that it cannot not exist without complicating matters by the inclusion of 'thought'" (45). This, however, is precisely what Anselm could *not* sensibly have done, if language about what "cannot" be the case standardly bore a "non-logical" meaning in Anselm's day.

I have suggested that Anselm employed the language of conceivability to invoke a notion of absolute possibility that exceeded the traditional, ultimately Aristotelian understanding of possibility as natural possibility. A number of writers have claimed, however, that such a notion of absolute possibility was simply beyond the intellectual purview of people until after Anselm's time—so dominant, the suggestion goes, was Aristotle's understanding of possibility. The writers in question adopt Jaakko Hintikka's well-known interpretation of Aristotle's account of modality, and suggest that this account of modality, so interpreted, was (with a qualification to be mentioned shortly) the only one available to Western thinkers until the twelfth century at the earliest. Whatever language Anselm used, he simply could not have had any inkling of absolute possibility.

The Hintikka-inspired interpretation of Aristotle's understanding of modality has it that Aristotle possessed no understanding of "synchronic" or "counterfactual" possibilities. Suppose that I am sitting at a certain time. Those in the Aristotelian tradition would certainly have allowed that it is possible that I should stand. But only, the suggestion is, if this is interpreted as meaning that I can stand *at some other time*. To suppose it possible that I should stand at *that* time is to suppose it possible that I should stand and sit at the same time; and that is clearly impossible. Hintikka suggested that Aristotle "was probably motivated by the idea that the only way in which we can think of a possibility to be realised is at some moment of time in our actual 'history of the world'" (1973: 109). In *De caelo* I.12 Aristotle ar-

gues that something that always exists cannot be destroyed. The argument he offers is that if it were possible for it to be destroyed, assuming it to be destroyed will not involve one in contradiction. Suppose the thing is destroyed. The thing in question, however, *ex hypothesi* lasts forever. So, granting our supposition *does* lead to a contradiction: the thing is both destroyed and so fails to exist, and also exists because it lasts forever. The patent awfulness of this argument, from a modern perspective, is explained by Hintikka by suggesting that Aristotle lacked the very conception of something being postulated as actual *rather than* what is in fact actual: that he lacked, in short, the very conception of alternative possibilities at a time.

The writer who has done most by way of interpreting later medieval discussions of modality in the light of Hintikka's interpretation of Aristotle is Simo Knuuttila. As we shall see in the next chapter, Anselm had access to an Aristotelian understanding of modality, primarily through the works of Boethius; and Knuuttila claims that Boethius, in particular, "did not develop . . . the idea of simultaneous synchronic possibilities. . . . On the contrary, he insisted that, at any present moment of time, only what is actual at that time is at that time possible at that time" (1993: 57). According to Knuuttila, not until the twelfth century do we find thinkers who "made efforts to add the idea of possibilities as synchronic alternatives to traditional modal conceptions, thus bringing a new theoretical element to Western modal thought" (1993: 45). If Knuuttila is right, the very possibility that Anselm should have had an appreciation of absolute possibility is excluded. This is because such a notion of possibility does extend to "synchronic" possibilities. If I am not sitting, it is certainly "logically possible" that I should have been—even at this precise time. In relation to a Modal Ontological Argument the issue is whether, even if God does exist, He *might not* have. The issue is not whether God might fail to exist at some other time. This involves an "alternative possibility" of the sort that Knuuttila claims to have been beyond the conception of anyone at Anselm's time.

I should say that Knuuttila's own pronouncements on this matter are somewhat fluctuating. Sometimes he seems to suggest that synchronic possibilities were simply beyond the ken of people at this time; elsewhere that they were barely recognized and were not systematically thought about. So the historical hypothesis we are to consider is perhaps stronger than one that Knuuttila would be willing to defend without qualification. Moreover, Knuuttila allows that there was what he terms an "Augustinian" corrective to the dominant Aristotelian view of modality—though, as he briefly and correctly indicates, it emerged earlier than Augustine in the Christian

tradition. "In the Christian tradition it was realised very early," he writes, "that, in order to avoid many difficulties, the possibilities of God must be assumed to be greater in number than what happens in the actual world . . . God has selected the actual form of the world from a set of possibilities" (1980: 199). Although, according to Knuuttila (1980: 236), this perspective was, until the twelfth century, restricted to the case of God—"it was not applied to the theory of modality in general"—this would be enough, perhaps, to give Anselm the mental wherewithal to conceive "synchronic" possibilities, and therefore, perhaps, to advance, at least implicitly, a Modal Ontological Argument for God's (or *G*'s) existence.

Katherin Rogers, however, has argued that both Augustine and Anselm believed that God could not have acted any differently from the way He actually does. In their view, she argues, "God 'had to' create the very world which He had actually created" (1997, 55–6).[8] If this is right, and there is no "Augustinian corrective," we are back to square one, and the sort of modality that is required for a Modal Ontological Argument would simply have been beyond Anselm's conceiving.

It may seem obvious that Rogers's suggestion is untenable. Right from the start Christianity defined itself, in part, in conscious opposition to the necessitarianism that was widespread at the time. The Church Fathers emphasized that God was totally free in His act of creation. As Irenaeus put it, God "made all things freely, and in whatever way He wanted" (*Haer.* 3.8.3). Or, as Theophilus of Antioch put it, God creates "whatever He wishes, as He wishes" (*Ad Autol.* 2.4). Tertullian stated the implied contrast with necessitarianism explicitly: "It was more fitting that He created willingly [*ex voluntate*] than from necessity" (*Adv. Hermog.* 14). The nature of the fittingness is pinpointed by Irenaeus. Those who suggest that God is subject to necessity, he writes, "make necessity greater and more of a master than God" (*Haer.* 2.5.4). Moreover, as Augustine among many others asserted, there was not even any incentive for creation other than God's own goodness (*Enchir.* 3.9). Indeed, since there was held to be no distinction between God and His goodness, there was no incentive for God other than Himself. There was, as Origen put it, no cause of God's creating "other than Himself, that is, than His goodness" (*De princ.* 2.9.6).

Moreover, throughout the period in question, and certainly in both Augustine and Anselm, we find repeated allusions to what God could have done, but did not—just the sort of passages that led Knuuttila to suppose that there was indeed an "Augustinian" alternative to an essentially Aristotelian conception of modality during this period. Augustine, to cite just

two examples, states that although God removed Adam's rib while Adam slept, God could have removed it while Adam was awake (*In ev. Ioan.,* 9.10); and that although God took six days to create the world, He could have created everything simultaneously (*De civ.,* 11.30). And Anselm's writings are simply full of such counterfactual claims. Here are just a couple of examples. God is correctly said to cause the nonexistence of what does not exist because He does not cause it to exist when He could (CD 1). God could have produced sinless descendants from Adam (CV 17).

There are, however, contrary indications. Given the Christian emphasis on God's freedom, omniscience, and omnipotence, what one might expect to find as a matter of course are passages in the Fathers and the early medieval tradition where God is said to select this world to create out of the endless possible worlds that are comprehended by His infinite intellect, and that He could have created—a position familiar at a later time from the writings of Leibniz. When, however, one looks at the literature this is what one hardly finds. Indeed, what one does usually find is something that seems to run counter to such a "Leibnizian" conception. Consider the following from Irenaeus, for example: "At the same time that God mentally grasped it, this thing that had been conceived by the mind was made" (*Haer.* 2.3.2). This seems to say that God immediately effects what He conceives. Again, Augustine writes that, because of the unity of the Word of God, all things are in the Word unchangeably and all at once, "not only those that now are in this universal creation, but also those that were to be and are to be" (*De Trin.* 4.1.3). What is significant here is what Augustine does not mention: it is, it seems, *only* things that at some time exist that are contained in the Word. What is especially significant is that Anselm himself may seem to have been of the same opinion. At one point he draws an analogy between God (or the "supreme essence") before He created the world and a human craftsman before he makes an artefact. Before they create they both have a "mental conception" *(mentis conceptio)* of what they will create (M 10): a conception that Anselm characterizes as an inner utterance *(intima locutio)* (M 11), and later as a word *(verbum)* (M 30). As in Augustine, there is no mention or suggestion of God inwardly uttering and conceiving possible things that He will not create. Later Anselm asserts not only that it is by the same word that God "says" both Himself and whatever He has created, he also asserts that God "says" *nothing other than* Himself and what is created (M 33).[9] In this passage Anselm also states that the things that a craftsman will produce exist in the craftsman's art, or his practical know-how, just as created things exist eternally in God's "art." When

Anselm goes on to stress that these things exist in the art even before they are made and after they have been destroyed, this perhaps strengthens the suggestion that it is *only* sometime existent things that are thus contained in the art: otherwise why did Anselm not say, as he easily might have, that even things that are never made exist in the art in virtue of the fact that the art could have made them? Indeed, Anselm elsewhere states that he is "not saying that something that exists always in eternity never exists in time, but just that it does not exist at some time" (C 1.5). If for such things to exist in eternity just is for them to exist in God's "word," we seem here to have a clear statement that *only* what will sometime exist is intelligibly contained in God. Moreover, since Anselm states that for God to "speak" and for Him to understand is one and the same thing (M 33), there seems to be no other place in God where "unrealized possibles" could be intelligibly located. Finally, Anselm stresses an important difference between divine and human conceptions. Whereas a human's conception does not suffice for the work to be produced, the divine Word does (M 11). It is to passages such as these that Rogers appeals in the first of her two principal arguments in favour of her necessitarian reading of Anselm (and Augustine). It is perhaps worth noting in this connection that even in the seventeenth century Leibniz faced opposition from Antoine Arnauld, grounded in traditional ways of thinking, to his postulation of merely possible individuals in the divine mind. In a letter to Leibniz dated 13th May, 1686 Arnauld claims that he has no "idea" of such purely possible substances that God never creates, and that they are chimeras that we invent. The only thing in reality they correspond to, Arnauld states, is the power of God, which, being "pure act," contains no "possibility" (Leibniz, 1965: II, 32).

There are, however, certain passages in traditional Christian writings that point in a more "Leibnizian" direction. In the course of insisting, as against Origen, that God can comprehend an infinity of things, Augustine states that if God so wished He could always make new things, unlike whatever went before, to infinity, and that He would timelessly foresee them all (*De civ.* 12.18). It is perhaps possible to read this passage in such a way that Augustine is saying that if God *had* willed to create an infinite succession of creatures, He *would* have contained them in His intellect—not that He actually does mentally contain such unactualized possibles. This, however, would be implausible, since such a difference in the divine intellect would be subsequent to, and grounded on, differences in God's will that would themselves be ungrounded, indeed blind, in a way that would almost certainly have been offensive to Augustine. I think it more likely that Augus-

tine is expressing a view that we find in Basil the Great, when he likens God to a potter. Just as a potter's art is not exhausted when he has made many pots, so God's creative power is not limited by what He has created (i.e., this actual world). Indeed, in His case uniquely this power extends to infinity. What determines what actually gets created, Basil goes on to say, is the divine will (*Hex.,* 1.2). In as much as it is the divine "art" that eternally contains creatures (as Anselm himself will insist), Basil's suggestion is clearly that this art contains the entire infinity of things that God could create, whether He does so or not. Here God's knowledge is not presented as being, as it were, self-implementing. Rather, what gets implemented is just what God's will determines should be created. There is also a passage in Augustine where, in writing of God's wisdom as an intellectual "storehouse," Augustine states that it contains infinite treasures (*De civ.,* 11.10.2). Augustine did not, however, think that the created world is infinite (e.g., *Conf.,* 7.5.7). So there must be more in this storehouse than actually exists. As for Anselm, although he begins his discussion of the inner divine "utterance" or "word" by likening God to a craftsman, by the end of his discussion the divine utterance turns out to be completely different in kind from that which is contained in a craftsman's art. Although Anselm insists that a word must be a word *for* something, there is no word for any created thing in God.[10] A word is a word for that of which it is a likeness; and nothing in God is a likeness of any created thing—just the reverse, in fact. The divine word is solely a word for God Himself because it is a (perfect) likeness of God (M 33–4). The whole idea that there are particular conceptions of (perhaps *just*) created things in the divine mind is now in the process of disappearing from view. Indeed, Anselm concludes his discussion of this matter by confessing that it is entirely incomprehensible to us how God can say and know what He creates (M 36). Given this, it is difficult to determine what exactly Anselm's view of the present issue may have been. In particular, we cannot draw Rogers's conclusions with any conviction.

Moreover, even if we were to concede the case to Rogers, it would not sustain the view for which she argues, and which alone is of significance for us, that for Anselm it is not possible that things should have been any different from the way they are. What we have been considering so far falls short of this in two respects. First, it has not been shown that for our traditional authors God had to create a world at all. And there is massive evidence against any such idea. I cite just two examples, from the two figures most relevant to us. When discussing the biblical statement, "In the beginning was the Word," Augustine says that although the original Greek word

"logos" can be rendered in Latin by either *"ratio"* (reason) or *"verbum"* (word), in the present context the latter is to be preferred, because it concerns the things that are made, whereas "reason is rightly so called even if nothing arises from it" (*De div. quaest.* 63). It is, however, the *rationes* in God that are supposedly restricted to what God will create. Elsewhere Augustine makes a similar remark even in connection with the term *"verbum."* Just as there can be a word of ours without anything else being thereby produced, similarly, he writes, "the word of God could have existed and no existing creature" (*De Trin.,* 15.11.20). As for Anselm, he states that God's—or, at this stage of the argument, the supreme essence's—word necessarily exists, and would exist even if nothing other than the supreme essence existed (M 33).

Secondly, the most that Rogers's considerations support is the idea that God could not have created any other *individuals* than the ones He actually creates. It is consistent with this that God could have created different worlds in as much as those individuals had different histories. This was later to be precisely Arnauld's position *(loc. cit.).* Perhaps the analogy with craft can be pushed further, however. It may be suggested that where art is perfect, as with God, what is to be created is contained in the art *in all its details*. This, however, would be to extract from the texts more than they seem to offer, and would involve (for these thinkers) a questionable obliteration not only of the distinction between creation and providence, but of that between what God effects and what He allows. For this final step to work, God needs to be seen as *effecting* everything that happens in the world in as inevitable a way as He creates what He creates. Augustine, for one, wanted to make a distinction here. Although, he says, nothing happens unless God wills it, this can be either by God "allowing it to happen or by Him Himself making it happen" (*Ench.,* 24.95). This, however, brings us to Rogers's second principal argument for her position, since it explicitly addresses both of these two points.

Rogers presents her second line of argument primarily in relation to Augustine; but, if cogent, it would doubtless, as Rogers implies, carry over to Anselm. This second line of argument concerns the possible reasons for God's action. No one thought that God created the world pointlessly or without reason. The reason why God created the world is both God's own goodness, as we have seen, *and the goodness of what He creates*. Augustine states explicitly that God created the world *because it was good,* so that the goodness of the world corresponds *(congruere)* to the divine goodness on account of which it was made (*De civ.,* 11.24). Elsewhere, in answer to the question why in the beginning God created light, Augustine states that it

was because light is good. There is, he goes on to say, no better cause of creation than this (*De civ.,* 11.21). An idea that was widespread at the time, one that goes back to Plato's *Timaeus,* but that was powerfully re-affirmed by the Neoplatonists who had so much influence on Augustine (and, hence, indirectly on Anselm), is that goodness is essentially *self-diffusive:* it necessarily expresses itself in the creation of good things. Augustine at one point closely follows the argument of the *Timaeus:* "If He were not able to make good things, He would have no power; but if He were able to but did not make them, His envy would be great" (*De Gen. ad litt.,* 4.16.27). Elsewhere Augustine refers to Plato by name and endorses his view on this matter (*De civ.* 11.21). This Platonic argument, even if it is given a necessitarian reading, will of course leave us a long way from the conclusion that Augustine (and hence, perhaps, Anselm) thought that God could not have failed to create this specific world of ours. So far we have at most the claim that God's nature required Him to create *a* world: that goodness must be "diffused" in some manner or other. Perhaps the final step can be made, however. For Augustine asserts that God does *nothing* without a sufficient reason. Perhaps the most striking illustration of this is his discussion of the question, later famously discussed by Leibniz, why God chose to create the world at just the location He did in the undifferentiated expanses of space. There was, insists Augustine, a reason for this choice, though it is unfathomable to us (*De civ.,* 11.5). Anselm, similarly, asserts that God's will is never "irrational"; and from the context it is clear that by this he means that His will never operates without a reason—though one that we shall, perhaps, never fathom (CDH 1.8). If God *never* acts without a reason in *any* respect, *every* divine action is, it may be suggested, required by its reason.[11]

This line of thought could be developed in such a way as to undermine the force of a passage that Knuuttila cites as expressing the "Augustinian corrective," and hence as incompatible with necessitarianism. In this passage Augustine claims that although Christ was born of a woman, He could have appeared on earth in a different manner. It is what Augustine says next that is significant. Although Christ *could* have appeared in a different manner, He *would* not (or willed not to: *potuit, sed noluit*) (*C. Faust.* 29.4). Augustine himself clearly thought that this phrase did justice to God's freedom, for he uses the same phrase in a context in which he is explicitly discussing a distinction, which had been aired by Pelagius, between whether something *can be* (which "concerns only possibility") and whether something *is*. This is a distinction, Augustine states, that no one doubts; and he goes on to give a specific instance of it. Christ raised Lazarus, but He did

not raise Judas. Nevertheless, insists Augustine, Christ *could* raise Judas, but He *would* not (*De nat. et grat.,* 7.8). The phrase *"potuit sed noluit,"* which in the form *"potuit . . . non voluit"* is echoed by Anselm (CDH 1.6, 1.8), later became common in discussions of divine freedom and omnipotence, in no small measure because of Peter Lombard's citation of it in his hugely influential *Sentences* (*Sent.* I, dist. 43). In particular, it fed into what became in the thirteenth century the philosophically highly important distinction between God's "absolute" and "ordained" power.[12] Although this distinction was sometimes employed to mark the contrast between the natural order and everything else, so that miraculous interventions would fall within God's absolute power, more usually (and this is the distinction that is relevant to us) everything that God brings about, including miracles, was seen as falling within God's ordained power—so that His absolute power concerned only unrealized possibilities. So far all of this may seem but to reinforce the anti-necessitarian perspective of these writers. And yet the overall position harboured problems, as we shall now see.

We can best appreciate these problems by looking at Augustine's account of omnipotence that lies behind his use of the *potuit sed noluit* phrase. According to Augustine, although God is omnipotent, there are many things He cannot do. He cannot die, for example; He cannot lie; He cannot sin. Indeed, argues Augustine, God *must* be incapable of such things if He is to be omnipotent. It is what he says next that is of importance to us. "He does whatever He wills. That is omnipotence" (*De symb. ad cat.,* 1.2). Elsewhere, Augustine suggests, it is being *able* to do whatever one wills that is omnipotence: God "is truly called omnipotent for no other reason than that He can do whatever He wills [or wishes: *vult*]" (*Ench.* 24.96). God is not required to be able to lie in order to be omnipotent, because He never wills such a thing. Unless it is qualified this is, however, a disastrous explication of omnipotence, as Peter Damian, in the generation before Anselm, argued against someone who propounded a similar view. Peter is responding to a claim of Desiderius, abbot of Monte Cassino, that God is unable to do something for no other reason than that He does not wish (or will) to. This seems to be an echo of Augustine; but it may be thought to go beyond what we have just seen Augustine claim, in that it suggests that if God does not will something, He *cannot* do it. In fact Augustine himself apparently endorsed this thesis. "What the Omnipotent does not will," he writes, "this alone He cannot do . . . He cannot, because He does not will it" (*Serm.,* 214.3–4). Be this as it may, it is this thesis that Peter focuses on; and he has little difficulty in showing that if it were true, God would be unable to do

anything other than what He in fact does—at least given, as was universally accepted, that everything that God wills is effected. To cite an example of Peter's: if God does not send rain today, clearly He did not wish to; but if God *can* do only what He wishes to do, God was incapable of sending rain today. This applies to every possible action that God does not perform. And this, Peter says, is absurd and ridiculous (*De div. omnip.* 597A). It is clear that in order to preserve divine omnipotence God must be credited with the ability to do at least some things—indeed many things, perhaps an infinity of things—that He does not actually will to do.

If some version of Augustine's account of God's inability to sin by reference to the divine will is to be preserved in the light of this, a distinction must be made among the things that God wills not to do. In particular, a distinction needs to be made between those things that God actually wills not to do and those things that God, because of His nature, could not possibly will to do. God cannot lie not merely because He wills not to, but because He could not will to. By contrast, God has the power to send rain today even if He does not, because, although He wills not to send rain, doubtless He could have so willed. Augustine's definition of omnipotence should be altered, therefore, so that it states that omnipotence is a matter of being able to do whatever one *can* will to do, and by limiting this latter ability only by things that it would be inconsistent for a perfect divine being to perform. Augustine's *potuit, sed noluit* could therefore be more fully stated as *potuit, potuit velle, sed noluit:* He could, He could have willed to, but He willed not to. It was, it seems, uncertainty over these matters that led some eminent thinkers to reject the later absolute/ordained distinction in relation to God's power. St. Bonaventure, for example, writes that "this distinction does not seem to be suitable, because God can do nothing that He cannot do ordainedly. For the absolute [*inordinate*] ability is a 'non-ability'—such as the ability to sin and the ability to lie" (*In I Sent.,* dist. 43, dub. 7). If no distinction is clearly drawn between God's not willing it to rain today and not willing to lie, such an objection is understandable. Peter Damian grasped this fact. Concerning something that God simply did not do, he says that "on no account is the omnipotent God to be said to be unable to do this, but rather to be unwilling." When it comes to doing evil, however, he says that "God cannot do it, because He cannot even will to." Only where something good is concerned can we say that God "can will it and do it" (*De div. omnip.* 600A). In fact, although he is not as emphatic on the point as he might have been, Augustine himself seems to have appreciated this. I quoted Augustine above as writing that God "cannot, because He

does not will it." He immediately follows this, however, by writing that this is "because He cannot will it." As he goes on to insist, "Justice cannot will to bring about what is unjust, nor wisdom what is foolish, nor truth what is false" (*Serm.* 214.4).

This is of immediate relevance to Anselm, since, at least where actions are concerned, Anselm insists that possibility is to be understood relative to the will: "All capability [*potestas*] follows the will. For when I say that I can speak or walk, it is implied: if I will. For if the will is not implied, it is not capability, but necessity" (CDH 2.10). This, however, leads Anselm to attribute capabilities that simply cannot be exercised. For example, in *Cur Deus homo* Anselm is asked by his interlocutor Boso whether Christ was capable of telling a lie. Anselm replies by saying that Christ could have lied, as any human being (as opposed to, say, a cat or a stone) can; but He did not have the capability of *willing* to lie, because of His perfect goodness. Anselm concludes that it is therefore true to say both that He could and that He could not tell a lie (CDH 2.10). Later Anselm applies this account to the question whether Christ could have avoided death. He could, because He was divine and therefore omnipotent; but he could not *will* to avoid death, because of the divine plan for redemption. Indeed, Anselm characterizes the inability to wish to avoid death as something that Christ possesses *"a se"* (CDH 2.16). Although Anselm is here specifically discussing Christ, since Christ was for Anselm fully divine, the point carries over to God as such. Anselm is attributing necessarily non-actualizable capacities to God (in this case, to lie) in just the way that was censured by Bonaventure. We do not, however, need to discuss the propriety of attributing capacities to a thing when there is absolutely no possibility of them being actualized. Even if it is the case, as Anselm insists, that there is a capacity in such cases, and so a sense in which the agent "could" act in a certain way, he also admits that there is a sense in which there is no such possibility. This is the relevant sense for us. To use the modern phraseology: Anselm held that there is no "possible world" in which Christ (or God) lies, because there is no possible world in which he wills to lie. It is at this point that Rogers's second principal argument comes into play. She argues, in effect, that according to both Augustine and Anselm God could not possibly have *willed* otherwise than He did. If God *potuit sed noluit* only in the sense in which, according to Anselm, Christ was able to lie, it is nugatory, and certainly irrelevant to us.

What is the evidence that either Augustine or Anselm may have thought that God's possibilities for willing are narrowed down to just what He actually willed to be the case? It is certainly true that they both thought that

many things that one may have thought were "up for grabs" were not, in fact, contingent or indifferent. Augustine argued, for example, that it was not fortuitous that God took six days to create the world, since six is a perfect number (*De civ.,* 11.30). The perfection of this number is not, presumably, a contingent matter. It is true, as we saw earlier, that Augustine does claim that although God took six days over creation, He could have created everything simultaneously; but this power now emerges as a perhaps nugatory one, since unrealizable. In a similar vein, Anselm claims that the number of beings who will attain perpetual felicity in heaven is a "rational and perfect" number known beforehand to God (CDH 1.16).[13] Human beings were created to make up this perfect number when some angels fell (CDH 1.18). What may be of significance is that in this passage Anselm employs the phrase "the perfection of the worldly creation." Perhaps Anselm just means to refer to the perfection, or completeness, of creation specifically in relation to this perfect number. Perhaps, however, he has a broader conception in mind: a total divine blueprint, as it were, of a perfect creation, of which the number of saved souls would be but one aspect.

Even if we were to accept all of this, it may be thought that we will not get more than we could, at best, extract from Rogers's first line of argument: namely, that the *individuals* in the actual world are the only possible individuals. Perhaps, however, this second line of thought can give us more. Anselm wrote *Cur Deus homo* in response to a request to explain "by what reason or necessity" God became man (CDH 1.1). It was, he asserts later in this work, "impossible" that mankind should have been saved in any other way (1.10). What is significant is that much of Anselm's argument is concerned with what is and is not fitting or seemly *(conveniens)* for God to do or allow. This mode of thinking became particularly common in the later thirteenth century in connection with the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, and was eventually encapsulated in the phrase *potuit, decuit, ergo fecit.* God *could* preserve the Virgin Mary from the taint of original sin from the moment of her conception; such a thing *was seemly;* therefore God *did it*.[14] What is notable about Anselm's deployment of this way of thinking is that he explicitly and repeatedly infers impossibility from unseemliness. At one point, for example, he considers the suggestion that a being that was not a descendant of Adam could have saved mankind. He argues that if such were to have happened, there would be a couple of consequences. He then writes that "these two are unfitting," and concludes that "therefore it is necessary that the man through whom the race of Adam is to be restored should come from Adam" (CDH 2.8). Anselm is, indeed, quite explicit

about his procedure. "In the case of God," he writes, "impossibility follows from any small thing that is unfitting" (1.10). It is true, as Michael Root (1987) has argued in detail, that Anselm never argues in the converse direction, from fittingness to necessity; but perhaps the former inference is all that Rogers requires.[15] For, it may be suggested, whenever God acts for a reason (as He always does), the reason indicates that the action in question is *better* than any alternative action (including refraining from acting); and it would be *unfitting* for God not to act according to what is best. It is true that Anselm allows that when one is presented with two options, one of which is better than another, the better course of action may not be demanded of one: it may be that one does what one "ought" whichever of the two actions one performs (CDH 2.18).[16] It is doubtful, however, that Anselm would have been willing to apply this to God. This is because Anselm makes the previous point in connection with the issue of *debt,* or of what is "owed." The verb *"debere,"* in Latin, means both "ought" and "owe." In the discussion in question Anselm is intent upon separating these two notions. The principal point he wishes to make is that in laying down his life Christ did what he *ought,* even though he *owed* nothing. Although it is proper to say of God that He ought to do or be certain things, there is never any question of debt or obligation (CDH 2.18). In all such matters it is simply a question of God being true to Himself. Moreover, the alternative to the action that is here in question—Christ's laying down his life—is one that Anselm, as we have seen, has said is something that Christ was not able to will. So, although there is never any question of debt, or obligation, it may be that Anselm believed that whatever God does is precisely what *ought* to be done. If God always has a reason for whatever He does, surely, it may be said, this is a reason that indicates why this thing *is to be done,* or why it *ought* to be done, and that the alternative *ought not* to be done. Anselm certainly infers at one point from something being such that God ought not to do it that God cannot do it (CDH 1.21). The ability to do what one ought not to do is, claims Anselm, no power at all, but impotence—something that cannot attach to God (P 8). Indeed, Anselm states that God ought to do what He wills (or wishes: *vult*), since what He wills *ought to be* (CDH 2.18). Furthermore, although Anselm does not infer necessity from fittingness, but only impossibility from unfittingness, he does infer necessity, where God is concerned, from the existence of a reason that is not outweighed: "For just as with God impossibility follows from unfittingness, however small, so necessity attends a reason, however small, if it is not overridden by a greater one" (CDH 1.10). If, however, there is always a reason for God's action (and,

of course, one that is not overridden), then Rogers's case may seem to be justified by Anselm's own words. Moreover, it is not simply unthinkable that a major Christian thinker of that time should have held a necessitarian view of God's action for such reasons. Just a generation after Anselm, Abelard clearly did: "God can make only what is suitable for Him to make; nor is anything suitable for Him to make that He omits to make" (*Theol. 'schol.'* 3.46).

Nevertheless, it is, I think, extremely unlikely overall that either Anselm or Augustine held the view attributed to them by Rogers. For one thing, no one at the time interpreted either thinker in this way. When Abelard does explicitly put forward the view, he states that it has few or no supporters, and that it is contradicted by the writings of the "saints" (*Theol. 'schol.'* 3.46). Moreover, Abelard was swiftly met with criticism and condemnation, eventually from the pope himself, for putting forward his view.[17] No such fate befell Anselm; and Augustine, of course, was regarded as a pillar of orthodoxy throughout this period. Secondly, Rogers's second line of argument, concerning the reasons for divine action, consists in finding claims that together may be thought to *imply* the necessitarian position. No explicit statement of the position itself is ever produced from the writings of either Augustine or Anselm; nor could it be, since there is none. The claims in question, however, were almost universally held—and by people who explicitly and repeatedly reject the necessitarian view. Aquinas is a clear case in point.[18] Thirdly, in order to avoid necessitarianism, a distinction needs to be drawn, as I have pointed out, between what God does not will and what He cannot will. Such a distinction is at least implicit in Augustine and Anselm in a way that counts against Rogers's position. All the examples these two authors give of things that God cannot do involve *non-being* in some form or other. God's inability to die is an obvious case; but so are God's inability to lie, or generally to sin, since sin was viewed by both these writers, in Neo-Platonic fashion, as a privation of good and hence of being.[19] God is not just "morally" incapable of performing evil acts, He is *ontologically* incapable of it. As the ultimate and primary locus of being, He can give rise only to being, and hence goodness. Peter Damian is explicit on the matter: "If it is an evil, and therefore is nothing, God in no way makes it" (*De div. omnip.* 608D). Anselm himself expresses the view as follows: "Just as only what is good comes from the highest good, and everything that is good comes from the highest good, so only essence comes from the highest essence, and all essence is from the highest essence. So, since the highest good is the highest essence, it follows that everything

good is an essence and every essence is good. Thus nothing and non-being is not from Him from whom there is nothing that is not good and an essence" (CD 1). This serves as a clear way of distinguishing what God *cannot* will from what he simply *does not* will. Many, indeed most, of the non-actual actions that Rogers represents Anselm as holding God incapable of performing because they are "unfitting" would involve the creation of that which possesses being. Just think, for instance, of the innumerable sinless human beings that God could, according to Anselm, have created. God's ability to perform such actions would not be, as Anselm insists God's inability to lie or to be corrupted is, "not power [*potentia*] but lack of power [*impotentia*]" (P 7). The passage from which this quotation is taken gives the strong impression that Anselm thinks that what he says applies to everything that God is incapable of doing. Only in this way, the passage implies, can God's omnipotence be preserved. Perhaps, however, this suggestion, even if present, is unwarranted. Are there not instances of things that God cannot do that cannot be accounted for by reference to non-being? God cannot change the past or, in general, alter what is true; and He cannot perform contradictory acts (CDH 2.17, CD 12). The reason given by Anselm for such impossibilities is that God steadfastly upholds the truth. This too, however, was ontologically grounded. God so upholds the truth because He *is* Truth itself (CDH 2.17; cf. P 14). Such actions are ultimately excluded because they would involve God not being true to Himself—indeed, not being Himself.

Finally, Rogers's argument concerning the reasons for divine action is based on a premise that is extraordinarily implausible. The premise is that—or that Anselm thought that—*every* divine action is such that there is no licit alternative. Every such alternative would be unfitting for God, or something God "ought" not to do. Now that we have seen how Anselm understands what "ought" to be in relation to God, we see that this amounts to the claim that God would not properly be Himself if He performed any such alternative action. The more insignificant the action, the more implausible this is. Anselm allows that Christ was not able to will to save his life. That, however, is because of God's ultimate plan for the salvation of mankind, which it would be "unfitting" for God not to see through to completion. But does such an inability attend every alternative to every action Christ performed, however insignificant? We read in the gospel narratives that Christ at one point stepped out of a boat (Lk. 8:27). Clearly, Christ stepped out of the boat either left foot first, or right foot first. Are we really to suppose that Anselm thought that, whichever it was, it was better so: that He *ought* so to have acted, and therefore necessarily did? That God

would not have been God otherwise, because He would not have steadfastly upheld His Truth? Anselm does state, as we have seen, that whatever God wills ought to be (CDH 2.18). In context, however, there is no suggestion of any sort of divine Categorical Imperative narrowing down all possible divine actions to just one in all possible situations. Anselm's statement is preceded by a brief discussion of the fact that sometimes, when we say that something ought to be the case with respect to a certain person, there is no implication that the person in question "owes" anything, or is in any way obligated. The poor ought to receive alms from the rich, writes Anselm. The debt here owed is not, however, one to be extracted from the poor, but from the rich: for what the claim really amounts to is that the rich ought to give alms to the poor. Such a "reversal" of obligations is always in play whenever we say that God "ought" to do something or be a certain way. "It is said that God ought to be of all things pre-eminent," writes Anselm, "not because here He is in some way obligated [*sit debitor*], but because all things should be subject to Him" (CDH 2.18). It is immediately after this that Anselm states that whatever God wills ought to be. The clear implication is that this latter is true because everything ought to be accommodated to God's will. Finally, Anselm explicitly states that it is not necessary for God to will as he wills, just as it is not necessary that we do (C 1.3). As we shall see in the following chapter, Anselm often construes necessity as amounting to compulsion, and therefore denies that it can properly be applied to God. It may be suggested that in this last passage this is all that Anselm is doing. That, however, is unlikely, since the work from which the quotation is taken is not one in which Anselm dilates upon the impropriety of applying the notion of necessity to God. It is, rather, one of the things that "we say" about God, and Anselm shows himself willing to follow such usage. He writes, for example, that "we say that it is necessary that God is immortal." It is in the very next section of this work that Anselm insists that it is *not* necessary that God will as He does.

In the light of this I believe that we can, in a sense, endorse Knuuttila's advocacy of an "Augustinian corrective" to the Aristotelian approach to modality. I say "in a sense" because the whole idea that people before the twelfth century had no conception of counterfactual possibilities—of things that might possibly have happened *rather than* what actually happened—except, perhaps, in the case of an omnipotent God, is remarkably implausible. Indeed, the idea is implausible even in relation to Aristotle himself. There are, it is true, several passages in Aristotle where he seems to equate what is *always* the case with what is *necessarily* the case: "If something exists

of necessity, it is eternal, and if it is eternal, then it exists of necessity" (*De gen. et corr.,* II.11, 338a1–2). Aristotle also states that "that which is such that it is possible for it not to exist [*to endechomenon mē einai*] is not eternal" (*Metaph.* XIV.2, 1088b23–5). Indeed, he claims that "in eternal things there is no difference between being possible [*endechesthai*] and being [*einai*]" (*Phys.* III.4, 203b30). Elsewhere he contrasts, in a way that seems intended to be exhaustive, things that are "always the same way and from necessity" with things that are not from necessity, but only for the most part, and things that are wholly variable (*Metaph.* VI.2, 1026b27ff). Moreover, as I mentioned earlier, in *De caelo* I.12 Aristotle offers an explicit argument for the thesis that whatever always exists is incorruptible and ingenerable, and hence unable not to exist.[20] Such passages do not, however, indicate an unqualified equation of "always" and "necessarily"—as Aristotle elsewhere makes clear. He himself gives the example of a cloak that is never in fact cut up, but is destroyed first. It is yet true to say of this cloak that it can be, or could have been, cut up (*DI* 9, 19a13–18). Aristotle restricts his claim about the invalidity of the notion of permanently unrealized possibilities to possibilities that *eternally exist* as unrealized possibilities. The ability of the cloak to be cut up is not of this sort, since its potentiality to be cut up ceases to exist with the destruction of the cloak itself. This example demonstrates that Aristotle did indeed possess a concept of "synchronic" possibility, since the possibility of the cloak's being cut up is a possibility for it at some (perhaps any) point in its finite existence when it was actually not cut up. Hintikka (1973, 100–1) recognized that Aristotle restricted his if-always-then-necessarily principle to eternal existents. Outside this restricted domain, unrealized possibilities abound, and were recognized to. Knuuttila, however, together with others who endorse his interpretative line, underestimates the significance of this fact. Boethius's recognition of cases such as that of the cloak leads Knuuttila to allow that "it may be that the idea of contrafactual possibilities was not totally beyond his purview" (1980, 187). This remark grossly understates the case. "If all things are now ready for me to go to Athens," Boethius writes at one point, "it is clear that I can go, even if I do not go" (*In Perih.* 2.236). The idea that he could go to Athens at some other time is obviously irrelevant to what Boethius is saying here. The point is that things are *now* ready—as perhaps they never will be again. Indeed, this passage is part of a refutation of those who hold the view that Knuuttila would all but attribute to Boethius. In this same stretch of text Boethius writes, of those who claim that if someone dies at sea it was not possible for that person to die on land, that they are completely in

error. I do not know if Boethius had a sense of humour, but he goes on to ask if such people are suggesting that if this person had never put to sea, he would have been immortal on land![21]

Finally, the fact that at least certain writers of this time recognized the existence of human freedom, construed in a certain libertarian fashion, counts decisively against Knuuttila's account (or, to repeat, the position that is perhaps somewhat stronger than Knuuttila would be prepared to defend). On the libertarian account in question, to say that a human being acted freely on a certain occasion is to recognize an alternative possibility at that very time. Human beings, in other words, are held to have the power to act differently from the way they actually act (at least sometimes). Rogers (1997: 61–2, 83) argues that Augustine was a necessitarian even as regards this. She suggests that his account of divine providence rules out any genuine alternatives to the actual course of history, and that he was, in modern terms, a "compatibilist" about free will. We need not go into that question, however, since it is quite impossible to argue any such thing in relation to Anselm.[22] One clear piece of evidence on this point concerns the perfect number of souls that will eventually populate heaven. Anselm holds both that there is such a number, which God is perhaps bound to respect, as we have seen; and also that God created mankind for its own sake, so that He would have created it whatever happened to the angels. From this he concludes that if humanity was created at the same time as the angels, God must have originally created the angels in a lesser number than the perfect number, otherwise there would be no "room" in heaven for any human souls *unless it was necessary that some angels or humans fell*. Anselm rejects this as being incompatible with free will (CDH 1.18). As a general comment on this whole issue, the following, from Boethius, is instructive: "God knows the future not as what will come about through necessity, but as contingent, so that He is not ignorant that something else can happen" (*In Perih*. 2.226).

Now that we have set aside those arguments that would exclude from the outset the modal interpretation of Anselm's talk about what can and cannot be "thought," let us consider the positive evidence for the interpretation. What we are in search of are indications that Anselm treated what is conceivable as possible absolutely speaking, and what is inconceivable as what is absolutely impossible (with the qualification noted in connection

with Gareth Matthews's view). I propose to begin our search for this evidence by considering the fourth and final argument against the modal interpretation.

As part of his case against a modal interpretation of Anselm, Jonathan Barnes 1972: 23) claims that Anselm "has an elaborate discussion of the logical modalities which is entirely innocent of psychologism." I have already pointed out the confusion that is involved in this claim. Anselm's explicitly modal language is not, as Barnes himself recognizes, and as we shall see in more detail in the following chapter, concerned with *logical* modalities at all, but with a modified Aristotelian understanding of power and ability. What is important for us now, however, is Barnes's suggestion that Anselm has a merely psychologistic understanding of conceivability. The term "psychologism" arose towards the end of the nineteenth century to denote the view that logic charts how the mind actually works (when in good condition). The essence of psychologism is the contention that there is no necessary relation between "logical reasoning" and truth. Barnes, therefore, seems to be suggesting that when Anselm says that something is inconceivable, he means simply that. Anselm is making a purely psychological claim about what we can conceive that has no ontological or logical consequences. Many other writers, too, claim that talk of conceivability has but a psychological significance for Anselm—all those mentioned in connection with the first two arguments considered in this chapter, for example. This suggestion could not be further from the truth, and it is refuted by passage after passage in Anselm.

In the first place, the suggestion that Anselm's claims about what is and is not conceivable have a merely psychological import renders incomprehensible Anselm's central strategy of employing conceivability as an index for a thing's greatness. This procedure would be futile if conceivability had no implication for matters ontological. At one point Anselm asks in what way God is greater than those things that will never have an end.[23] One reason he gives is that God cannot even be conceived to have an end, whereas these other things can be (P 20). Anselm clearly takes this fact about inconceivability to indicate something about the very being or nature of God. And as for the matter that is our central concern: why, if inconceivability is a merely psychological matter, should Anselm think it so important that God should be such that He cannot be conceived not to exist? This would be a fact about *us* rather than something that indicates the greatness of the divine essence. Moreover, as soon as Anselm introduces the idea of not being conceivably nonexistent, it is from the start inseparably and explicitly

related to ontological issues. What is claimed of *G* in *Proslogion III* is not simply that it cannot be conceived not to exist, but, rather, that it *so truly exists* that it cannot be conceived not to exist. As we shall see in more detail later, by this phrase Anselm intends a certain superlatively great manner of existing. Here, as elsewhere, inconceivability is not, for Anselm, some merely psychological or cognitive phenomenon, but an index of how things stand in reality.

Moreover, if Anselm's claims about what is and is not conceivable had merely psychological import, Anselm would never infer anything about an object or a state of affairs or the truth-value of any proposition from the fact that it cannot be conceived to exist or to obtain or to be true. But he does, repeatedly. Here is one of the more striking passages: "What does not exist is able not to exist; and what is able not to exist can be conceived not to exist" (R 5). By Hypothetical Syllogism this yields, "What does not exist can be conceived not to exist." And this, by Contraposition (and Double Negation) yields, "What cannot be conceived not to exist exists." There are many other passages where Anselm infers falsity or nonexistence from inconceivability. At one point in the *Monologion,* for example, Anselm claims that it cannot be conceived that truth should have a beginning or an end, and states categorically that truth does not have a beginning or an end (M 18). Is it supposed to be a coincidence that what cannot be conceived is not the case? Earlier in the same work Anselm rules out there being anything other than the "supreme essence" and its creation on the grounds that "nothing at all can even be conceived to exist" beyond these two (M 7).[24] How could Anselm have been sure that there is nothing other than the supreme essence and its creation unless he believed it to be *impossible*? Moreover, if inconceivability does not imply absolute impossibility, Anselm's core notion of *something than which a greater cannot be conceived* would lack the power that he manifestly attributed to it. Can it really be supposed that Anselm thought that even if there is something a greater than which cannot be conceived, something greater than this is *possible*—in any sense? Indeed, if Anselm did not believe that it is simply impossible for there to be something greater than something than which no greater can be conceived, it is puzzling how he could regard it as self-evident, as he did (R 5), that something than which no greater can be conceived is, given that it exists, the greatest thing there actually is. The only justification, surely, for the claim that there would be no greater thing is that there could not be.

There are, moreover, passages where Anselm makes the connection between inconceivability and absolute impossibility more or less explicit.

In a discussion of God's simplicity Anselm writes as follows: "It is necessary that every composite thing can be decomposed either actually or by the mind, something that cannot be understood of simple things. For no mind can dissolve into parts that whose parts cannot be conceived" (EIV 4). From the fact that it is greater not to be divisible by the mind than to be so divisible, Anselm infers that God must be absolutely simple. I have already suggested that when Anselm writes of something being impossible "for the mind," he means that it is inconceivable. Anselm is, therefore, implicitly inferring from the fact that God cannot be conceived to be divided that it is *absolutely impossible* that God should be divided—since such an absolute impossibility manifestly attaches to anything that has no parts at all. Again, in the *Monologion* Anselm asserts that "nothing is through nothing." The reason he gives for this is that "it cannot even be conceived that there should be something that is not through something" (M 3). Anselm certainly did not think it merely *contingently* the case that nothing is through nothing. Even the "supreme essence" who is God cannot, he asserts, bring it about that something should exist through nothing (M 5).[25] An absolute impossibility is here indicated by the impossibility of conceiving something.

In the above I have been arguing for an entailment from inconceivability, as Anselm understands this notion, to absolute impossibility. The converse entailment is equally clearly present in Anselm's writings. Consider, for example, the passage concerning simplicity to which we have just attended. If something is absolutely simple, Anselm states, it cannot be divided by the mind: that is, it cannot be conceived to be divided. The reason for this, surely, is that it is an *absolute impossibility* for a simple thing to be divided, and manifestly so. Perhaps it is even clearer that Anselm endorsed this inference when it is considered in the logically equivalent form: conceivability entails possibility. In this connection consider *Proslogion II.* Anselm here asks you to conceive of *G,* and to accept that *G* therefore exists at least in your mind. Anselm then states that *it can be conceived to exist in reality as well.* If conceivability does not entail "logical" possibility, it is consistent with this last fact that it should be absolutely impossible for *G* actually to exist. But that, of course, would undermine Anselm's whole argument. Anselm's work, as we shall see, contains a number of arguments concerning God's (or *G*'s) existence that turn, in part, on claims that something or other is conceivable. If all such claims were compatible with the absolute impossibility of whatever is claimed to be conceivable, our interest in such arguments ought to be nil.

In order to understand properly the role of conceivability in Anselm's thought, we need to understand its relation to *reason (ratio).* Anselm could hardly have had a "higher" conception of reason. He repeatedly writes of what reason "teaches" us (e.g., M 4, 12, 15, 65). He refers to the "light of reason" (M 6), and to something being apprehended "by the pure insight [*intuitus*] of reason" (CV 13). He is even willing to define truth as "rightness [*rectitudo*] perceptible by the mind alone" (V 11)—and the context makes it clear that it is specifically reason that is in question. Moreover, reason gives us access to *things themselves*. Everyday words refer to things; and we can, by uttering them either overtly or inwardly, refer to things. Such words do not, however, give us cognitive access to the things themselves to which they refer. Reason does.[26] By "reason's understanding [*rationis intellectu*]" the things themselves *(res ipsae)* are spoken by an "inner," "natural," mental word. The things themselves are "beheld in the mind by the acute sight of thought [*acie cogitationis in mente conspiciuntur*]" (M 10).[27] As I mentioned in the Introduction, there is an issue concerning what precisely Anselm meant when he characterized many of his arguments as based on "necessary reasons." As we saw, David Knowles has gone so far as to suggest that for Anselm "the adjective *necessarius* means 'formally admissible', 'probable', rather than 'compelling' " (1962: 101). In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. It is widely recognized that Anselm's use of this term is influenced by earlier writings on rhetoric and dialectic. This tradition, however, precisely distinguished between "probable" arguments and "necessary" ones. Boethius, for example, distinguished between probable and necessary arguments on the grounds that the former appeal to what most people, or most enlightened people, will regard as true, and so are based on "verisimilitude," whereas the latter are based on what is true and have "the solidity of truth" (*De top. diff.* 1180C–1181A).[28] Cassiodorus said essentially the same (*De art. et disc.* 3).[29] It is true that Anselm states that "if I say something that is not confirmed by a greater authority, however much I may seem to prove it by reason, it is to be accepted with no other certainty than that it seems so to me for the present, until God reveals something better to me" (CHD 1.2). This, however, is simply intellectual humility. It in no way suggests that Anselm *took* his arguments to be based on anything less than solid truth and not to be wholly cogent; and everything Anselm writes in this connection demonstrates the opposite. Perhaps, however, Knowles was merely suggesting that although a "necessary" argument or reason must, for Anselm, be based on the truth, it need not be based on a *necessary* truth.

This may well be so. It is true that both Boethius and Cassiodorus characterize a necessary argument as one that not only states how things truly are, but one that states what "cannot be otherwise" *(loc. cit.).* When, however, Boethius gives examples of necessary arguments, it seems that what he has in mind as being necessary is a certain *inference,* or the relation between a reason and a conclusion. "If something is added to a thing, the whole is made greater" is his example of a "necessary argument"; and "if she is a mother, she loves her son" his example of a merely "probable argument." Moreover, Anselm frequently draws upon "truths" of revealed religion to ground his "necessary" arguments. It is, for example, a fundamental premise of *Cur Deus homo* that God created man for beatitude. This proposition is hardly a "logically necessary truth," if only because, Anselm held, God need not have created man at all.[30] Nevertheless, *given* certain premises—which, incidentally, Anselm never takes as being less than certain—the reasoning that Anselm then engages in is never merely "probable." When reason is at work in the course of a valid argument, it has the power to *force* the intellect to perceive *(sentire)* how matters stand (M 16). Reason has, as Anselm puts it elsewhere, an "unbending strength" (M 29). For Anselm, reason, intrinsically and essentially, *grasps and tracks the truth.*

This is of relevance to us because for Anselm there is an intimate connection between reason and conceivability. We have, in effect, already seen one indication of this. It is by "the acute sight of thought" that the very things themselves are apprehended. The word I have here translated as "thought" *(cogitatio)* is derived from the verb that I have been translating as "conceive" *(cogitare).* More explicitly, Anselm at one point asks rhetorically if it is even conceivable that the "supreme wisdom" should fail to understand itself, and so should fail to utter a "word" for itself (M 32). The correct negative answer is later characterized as follows: "*Reason demands* that that word by which it utters itself exist necessarily" (M 33). To reject what is inconceivable as false and impossible is to follow the dictates of reason—reason, as he says at one point, "with truth and necessity jointly confirming it" (M 19). Indeed, the denial of a truth that is thus enforced by reason is characterized as an "irrational thought," something that "no reason allows" (M 3). When something is inconceivable it is reason that rules it out—absolutely. Elsewhere he characterizes such thoughts in terms of senselessness. In *Cur Deus homo* Anselm asks Boso if he can conceive that a man who has sinned and has not paid satisfaction for the sin is equal to an angel who has not sinned. Boso agrees that he can conceive no such thing. The way he expresses this is significant: "I can conceive and say those words,

but I cannot conceive their sense [*sensum*], just as I cannot understand falsity to be truth" (CDH 1.19). It is clear that the suggestion is not that the words bear some sense that is escaping Boso due to the limitations of his intellect. It is rather that the words bear no coherent sense. There is simply no possibility, in *any* sense of the word, that they express. For Anselm the impossibility that inconceivability entails is as great as the impossibility of what is senseless being true.

3

ANSELM'S UNDERSTANDING OF POSSIBILITY

In the previous chapter I claimed that when Anselm states that something is "not possible" or that it "cannot" be the case, he is not, at least in the passages that are relevant to us, invoking a notion of "logical" or absolute impossibility. The notions of possibility and impossibility that Anselm has in mind, I suggested, are broadly Aristotelian in character, so that they are to be understood in terms of the powers, capacities, and incapacities of things. In the present chapter I substantiate this claim. The purpose of the present chapter is not, however, simply to tie up a loose end in the previous one. Attaining a proper appreciation of how Anselm employed explicitly modal language is essential for understanding at least some of his arguments that have been claimed to contain a Modal Ontological Argument. A perhaps even more important justification for the present chapter is that the goal of the present work is to identify and highlight Anselm's "other argument." This argument, as we shall see, hinges on Anselm's understanding of modality. We need, therefore, to grasp what that was.

One of the first writers to have emphasized that Anselm's modal language is to be understood in the context of a broadly Aristotelian tradition was D. P. Henry. He pointed out, in particular, that according to this traditional way of looking at things there are many necessary beings in the world. Henry (1967: 147) suggested that what is going on in the first half of *Proslogion III* is "the exaltation of the being of X [i.e., *G*] above the multiplicity of those necessary beings which are such that thought can decompose them, and which hence, while *not possible not to be,* can nevertheless be *thought* not to be." These other "necessary beings" would not have been regarded by Anselm as existing with *absolute* or "logical" necessity—if only because, Anselm would have held, God need not have created them at all.

That we should be wary of interpreting medieval claims about possibility and necessity, especially when they concern the existence of God, as being about absolute possibility and necessity should be obvious even to those who are no experts in mediaeval philosophy from such a well-known passage as the third of Aquinas's "Five Ways." In the first part of this argument Aquinas points out that since there are things that are able both to exist and not to exist—as the fact of generation and corruption shows—there must be at least one being that is not like this, but is a necessary being. In the second part of the argument Aquinas argues that there cannot be a regress of such necessary beings: there must be one (and only one) whose necessity is underived—or, as he puts it, a being such that the "cause of its necessity" is not "from elsewhere." Such a being will be a *per se* necessary being, and will be the cause of the necessity of all other necessary beings (*S Th,* Ia, q. 2, a. 3).[1] Aquinas is here allowing at least the theoretical possibility of a plurality of necessary beings. Elsewhere Aquinas makes it clear that they are more than a mere theoretical possibility: "Among created things there are some whose being is simply and absolutely necessary" (*SCG* II, c. 30). Such beings will not be "logically necessary" unless they arise necessarily from a *per se* necessary being, and this latter exists of logical necessity. Aquinas certainly denied the former. The *per se* necessary being in question is, of course, God; and God gives rise to everything other than Himself, "necessary" beings included, through a free act of creation and not through any necessity (e.g., *De pot.* q. 3, a. 15). There is only one thing that God wills of necessity, and that is His own goodness (*ST* Ia, q. 19, a.3). Aquinas makes it clear that he regards the necessary character of derivatively necessary beings as wholly compatible with their dependence on God's free will: "That God is said to have produced things in being through will, not through necessity, does not take away the fact that he willed certain things to be that exist of necessity and certain things that exist contingently" (*SCG* II, c. 30). Since, according to Aquinas, Creation took place at some point in the finite past, it is not even the case that such necessary beings have always existed. Moreover, it is possible, absolutely speaking, for God to withdraw His gift of being from them. They would then relapse into nothingness (*De pot.* q. 5, a. 3 c and ad 8; *ST* Ia q. 10, a. 5).[2] Aquinas's necessary beings are clearly not necessary in an absolute sense.

When Aquinas characterizes a being as "necessary," what he means is that it is *incorruptible:* that it cannot cease to exist through any natural process (though God could, absolutely speaking, annihilate it). Something is necessary in the relevant sense, Aquinas states, if there is in it no possibility

for non-being. There is such a possibility in and only in things possessing matter that can receive more than one form. Hence immaterial things (such as intellectual souls), and things whose matter is incapable of receiving any form other than the one they possess (such as heavenly bodies), are "simply and absolutely necessary" (*SCG* II, c. 30).[3] As he says elsewhere, "It is not inconsistent for the being of something necessary and incorruptible to depend on something else as its cause. So when it is said that all things, including angels, would fall into nothingness unless sustained by God, it is not to be understood that there is any principle of corruption in angels, but that the being of an angel depends on God as a cause. For a thing is not said to be corruptible because God can reduce it to not being by taking His conservation away, but because it has some principle of corruption, or a contrariety, or at least the potentiality of matter, in itself" (*ST* Ia, q. 50, a. 5 ad 3).

When Anselm says of *G* that it cannot not exist (e.g., R 5), perhaps he intends no more than does Aquinas in his discussion of "necessary" beings. Perhaps all Anselm means is that anything that is *G* harbours within it no "potentiality" for ceasing to exist. And, more generally, when Anselm writes of what "cannot be," perhaps he too is concerned merely with what we may term "natural necessity"—the necessity that follows from the causes, principles, and natures of things. Anselm and Aquinas were, after all, heirs to a very similar tradition. It is true that many of Aristotle's works became available in the West in Latin translations only in the century after Anselm's death. Doubtless some of these, as well as other works that were unavailable to Anselm, helped shape Aquinas's views.[4] However, not only does Aristotle have quite a lot to say about possibility and necessity in his work *De interpretatione* (or *Peri hermeneias*), which was available in Latin in the earlier Middle Ages, Boethius wrote two long commentaries on this work that were widely read; and we know that Anselm was familiar with Boethius's writings.[5] It is, indeed, primarily to Boethius's work that Henry points in order to substantiate his claim that Anselm was working with a broadly Aristotelian notion of possibility and necessity.

Boethius, following Aristotle (*DI* 13, 23b7–11), distinguishes two sorts of possibility *(possibilitas).* There is, for example, the possibility of walking that attaches to someone who is actually walking; and there is the possibility of walking that attaches to an able-bodied person who is sitting. It is, as Boethius expresses it at one point, the distinction between a power that is *secundum actum* and a power that is not (*In Perih.* 1.202). I shall distinguish these two by using the terms "actuated" and "unactuated" possibility, respectively. Boethius himself terms the second of these "potentiality" *(potestas)* (*In*

Perih. 2.454). The reasonable thought behind the former conception is that if we deny to someone who is actually walking the possibility of walking, we seem to be saying that it is impossible for him to walk—which cannot be right, since he is actually doing it. This first sort of possibility itself has two forms, depending on whether or not the actuality in question has arisen from a state of "potentiality"—possibility in the second sense, or "unactuated possibility." Anyone who is now actually walking was, of course, at some previous time not walking. On the other hand, there are some things that are always "in act" in some respect. The sort of actuated possibility that has arisen from an unactuated potentiality is to be found only in things that are generated and can be corrupted. All "incorruptible and divine" things have only the second sort of power. Some changeable, corporeal things, however, also possess the latter species of possibility. Fire, for example, is always actually hot (*In Perih.* 2.454–5). Now, what is of importance for us is that the last sort of possibility—permanently actuated possibility—was regarded by Boethius as amounting to *necessity.* Fire's always being hot means that fire is hot necessarily. And, in general, "necessary things are those that are always actual" (*In Perih.* 1.205).

As we saw in the previous chapter, Aristotle held that it is not possible for a possibility or potentiality to exist for all time and not be realized.[6] We also saw that Aristotle did not simply equate "always" and "necessarily" without qualification. He himself gives the example of a cloak that is never in fact cut up, but is destroyed first. It is yet true to say of this cloak that it can be, or could have been, cut up (*DI* 9, 19a13–18). There are, in fact, just three sorts of cases to which the "if always, then necessarily" principle was applied: incessant processes, such as the daily setting of the sun; permanent features of permanent things—whether of permanent individuals, such as the sun's radiating light, or of kinds, such as the heat of fire; and the eternal existence of permanent things, such as the heavenly bodies. From the fact that something like fire is always hot, we cannot infer that fire exists necessarily. Boethius is quite clear on this point. He reserves the term "necessary possibility" for those things that *both* never fail to exercise the power in question *and* always exist (*In Perih.* 2.456). No one, he claims, would put fire and its heat in this class, "for fire itself can be extinguished" (ibid., 2.414). The proper thing to say is: "It is necessary for fire to be hot as long as fire exists" (ibid., 2.239). By contrast, "In those things that are necessary, not only must the quality never leave the subject—something that we see to be the case with fire, from which the quality of heat never withdraws—but the substance that is the subject is itself seen to be immortal: something that

does not apply to fire" (ibid., 2.414). So it is precisely in eternal things that we find complete necessity: "That which is eternal changes in no way, and it is always necessary for it to be" (ibid., 2.411).

Given all of this, it is perhaps not surprising that Henry claims that for Boethius there are many beings, and not just God, of which it is true to say that they "cannot not exist." The sun, for example, will never cease to exist. Therefore it cannot not exist. It exists necessarily. As Henry (1967: 139) puts it, "Boethius considers the heavenly bodies to be 'necessary beings,' always in act." If Anselm inherited this perspective, then his use of phrases such as "cannot not exist" will not apply uniquely to *G*—to which, of course, any sort of ontological argument alone applies (R 5)—and certainly will not express absolute or "logical" necessity.

There are, however, grave objections to interpreting Boethius (and hence, perhaps, Anselm) as having held the sort of Aristotelian view of necessity and possibility outlined above. It should be borne in mind that Boethius was writing a commentary on Aristotle. "My purpose," he writes, "was to disclose the most subtle opinions of Aristotle" (*In Perih.* 2.186). We should not, therefore, assume that Boethius endorses all the opinions he airs.[7] This is relevant to Anselm, since he would hardly have endorsed views simply because they were (on Boethius's authority) Aristotle's.[8] If Anselm was influenced by Boethius, as clearly he was, it would be because of what Anselm discerned as the real opinions of his fellow Christian. It is, at the very least, much more likely that Anselm would have concurred with Boethius's own views if they departed from Aristotle's for Christian reasons. And depart they did, on at least two issues.

The Aristotelian position that Henry ascribes to Boethius has it that eternal or sempiternal existence is both necessary and sufficient for necessary existence. Neither Boethius nor Anselm, however, being Christians, believed that anything other than God was either eternal or sempiternal. Not only did they believe that nothing other than God possesses eternity in the traditional sense of being wholly outside time; they believed in the doctrine of Creation according to which every creature has a finite past, since everything except God came into existence. To claim that nevertheless some of these created beings exist necessarily would be to depart significantly from the Aristotelian heritage. As we have seen, acceptance of the doctrine of Creation did not prevent Aquinas from explicitly recognizing necessary beings other than God. What this shows, however, is that something other than Aristotle's equation of eternity (or sempiternity) with necessity is at work.

This is reinforced by a second point of disagreement. Boethius held that the human soul will last forever (*De fide,* 70; *Cons*. II, Prose IV).[9] Nevertheless, he also held that such a soul is intrinsically corruptible. A soul that lasts forever will do so, according to Boethius, only because it will have been *made* incorruptible.[10] Of incorporeal substances, according to Boethius, some are irrational—he mentions the lives (*vitae:* perhaps "life principles") of the higher animals—and some rational;[11] and of the latter "one is immutable and impassible, as is God, and one through creation is mutable and passible, though through the grace of the impassible substance it can be changed into the steadfastness of impassibility like that of angels" (*C. Eut.* 82).[12] However one stretches Aristotelian doctrine, nothing can be both corruptible and necessary. So, a soul cannot be a necessary being, for Boethius, even though it live forever. Perhaps it will *become* a necessary being, when the "steadfastness of impassibility" is conferred on it; but before this it is not. A similar divergence from Aristotelianism is to be found in Anselm. Although he, like his major influence Augustine (e.g., *De Trin.* 14.4.3–4; *Ep.* 116.2.3), and as against Boethius, regarded human souls as intrinsically immortal (M 72), he held that it is contingent that human *bodies* are corruptible. If Adam had not sinned, man—the whole man, body and soul—would have been made incorruptible (CDH 2.3). Neither corruptibility nor incorruptibility attaches to the essence of man, and so one can be exchanged for the other: "I do not hold mortality to attach to the pure, but to the corrupt, nature of man. Indeed, if man had never sinned and his immortality had been immutably confirmed, he would not have been any the less true man. And when mortals arise in incorruptibility, they will not be less true men. For if mortality attached to the truth of human nature, there could never be a man who was immortal. Therefore, neither corruptibility nor incorruptibility attaches to the true being [*sinceritas*] of human nature" (CDH 2.11).

The reason for these significant departures from Aristotelianism in both Boethius and Anselm lies, of course, in the fact that they both had a conception of the divine as something that can confer supernatural benefits on nature, allowing nature to exceed its own capacities. The important point in all this for us is that if these two figures had a conception of necessary beings other than God, this conception is going to rest on something other than sheer everlastingness. What it rests upon is the *nature* of the things in question; and, more precisely, on whether they possess matter and on the kind of matter they possess. "What exists potentially [*potestate*] in things," Boethius writes, "comes from matter." Matter is "susceptible of contrariety," so that an enmattered thing has an affinity for each of two

contraries (*In Perih*. 2.238). By contrast, "Whatever things have no affinity for contraries are posited as necessary" (ibid., 2.236). Fire is necessarily hot not simply because fire is always hot, but because the quality of heat has been "conjoined with its matter by nature"; it "informs the substance" of fire. The qualities of a thing that may come and go are, by contrast, external (ibid., 2.239). Moreover, the Aristotelian principle that a potentiality cannot forever exist unrealized is given a metaphysical grounding: "If fire had a certain affinity for cold, that affinity would be in vain if fire were never cold. But we know that nature is in the habit of developing no innate property [*proprium natum*] in vain" (ibid., 2.236). Later, Aquinas, commenting on Aristotle's argument that eternal (or sempiternal) things must enjoy necessary existence, supplements Aristotle's purely logical and temporal considerations with a metaphysical one: "Nothing ceases to exist except when it cannot exist, *since everything desires to exist*" (*In de caelo,* I, lect. 29, n.5).[13]

What we have discovered as the perspective on possibility and necessity that was dominant throughout the earlier Middle Ages, and to which, therefore, Anselm himself almost certainly subscribed, is a *modified* Aristotelianism. Something can be a necessary being even if, because of Creation, it has not always existed. Moreover, there is a sense in which perpetual future existence does not suffice for necessary existence—though there is also a sense in which it does. A human soul, for Boethius, will last forever only because "impassibility" will have been conferred on it. Our mortal bodies, for Anselm, will live forever after the general resurrection only because "incorruptibility" will have been conferred on them. I take this to mean that such beings *become* necessary beings. If this is right, then existing perpetually does suffice for being a necessary being *at least eventually*. What ultimately sustains the attribution of necessary existence to such beings, however, is a certain nature: *impassibility* or *incorruptibility*. In virtue of having such a nature, a thing cannot possibly be destroyed by any natural process or event, internal or external. The only way in which a being with such a nature could cease to exist is through a supernatural divine act: by God withdrawing His conservation of the creature.[14] Any such necessary being is clearly necessary in a *causal* sense. It is a matter of "natural necessity," not "logical necessity." If Anselm was working with this sort of understanding of the notions of possibility and necessity (and it would be extraordinary if he was not, given its prevalence), then, if Anselm had some appreciation of logical (or absolute) possibility and necessity, he would have employed some alternative language in which to express it. As I suggested in the previous chapter, the language of conceivability is a natural candidate.

Before proceeding, I should point out that there are many instances where Anselm's language of possibility and necessity, and of what can and cannot be, does not express natural or causal necessity. He often, for example, characterizes as holding of necessity examples of basic logic truths, such as the law of excluded middle—for example, "It is necessary for either something or nothing to precede or follow [the supreme essence]" (M, 19)—and the law of non-contradiction—for example, "One and the same thing cannot both be conceived and not conceived" (R 9). Anselm particularly favoured arguments that proceed by the *reductio ad absurdum* of some supposition; and the absurdity, usually in the form of an explicit contradiction, is repeatedly claimed to be impossible. One example of this common procedure is in *Proslogion II* where Anselm argues that if *G* does not actually exist, "that very thing than which a greater cannot be conceived is something than which a greater can be conceived. But this certainly cannot be." Anselm also characterizes various statements that today would be regarded as conceptual truths as involving necessity. At one point, for example, he claims that one cannot love God without end unless one exists without end; and that if something does not exist, then "out of necessity" it does not love (M 69). Again, before God created anything, He was "able" to make absolutely nothing through anything other than Himself, since there was no other thing (M, 7). There are also a whole host of states of affairs that Anselm claims to hold with necessity that do not involve causal necessity but (for him) some sort of metaphysical necessity. For example: what is true cannot exist without truth (V 1); when a circumscribed body is wholly in one place at a certain time, it is not possible for it to be in another place at that time (P 13); it is necessary for a human being to be rational (G 3); every cause is necessarily something that lends support to the essence of the effect" (M 8); it is necessary that a thing is greater than another to the extent that it is more similar to that which exists supremely and is supremely great (M 31); if there is burning, it is necessary that there is fire—even though, as Anselm points out, burning does not cause fire, but conversely (CD 3).

Furthermore, on a number of occasions (e.g., CDH 2.17; C 1.2) Anselm makes a distinction between "precedent necessity" and "consequent necessity." Early medieval thinkers followed Aristotle (e.g., *Rhet.* III.17, 1418a3–5; *Eth. Nic.* VI.2, 1139b7–9) in holding that there is a sense in which the past is necessary. The basic idea is that the past *cannot be changed*. Anselm—like Peter Damian before him (*De div. omnip.* 602D–603A)—applies this idea also to the present and the future.[15] If you are now speaking, there is a sense in which it is correct for me to say that it is necessary that you are

speaking, "For when I say this, I mean that nothing can make it the case that while you are speaking you are not speaking." And for similar reasons Anselm asserts that "whatever is going to be is necessarily going to be" (CDH 2.17). These are all examples of "consequent necessity." Anselm's main point in discussing this matter is to emphasize that no fatalism or compulsion is implied, since the necessity in question *follows* from a given fact. The fact itself need not be necessary, and will not be when free intentional action is involved. By contrast, the turning of the heavens is necessary in virtue of a "precedent" necessity. Here natural necessity and compulsion are indeed involved: "For the violence of a natural condition forces the heavens to revolve, but no necessity makes you speak [when you are speaking]" (CDH 2.17). "Consequent necessity," therefore, is yet another case of non-causal or non-natural necessity recognized by Anselm.

So, there are numerous instances of Anselm employing a notion of necessity that is other than that of natural or causal necessity. This is hardly surprising, if only because Aristotle himself also had a notion of necessity that is logical or conceptual rather than natural.[16] Nevertheless, this casts no doubt on the suggestion that when Anselm invokes the notions of possibility and necessity in the contexts that are of concern to us—crucially, in the context of the question whether a thing can *exist* or not—it is the "modified Aristotelian" understanding of these notions that is in play.

There is, however, a major problem with this line of interpretation as it stands. It is posed by two claims that Anselm makes. The first is that "what does not exist is able not to exist" (R 5). The only way to construe this in line with a modified Aristotelianism is as saying that anything that does not actually exist is the sort of thing that—unlike an angel—harbours within it a natural potentiality for nonexistence: something, in other words, that is corruptible and passible. But someone who denies that angels exist is not supposing (or at least not necessarily supposing) that an angel is the sort of being that is naturally corruptible—or, more generally, that the only sorts of things that fail to exist are corruptible sorts of things. Consider a particular angel that God did not create, though He could have.[17] On the modified Aristotelian conception, such an angel is the sort of thing that cannot not exist, since it is incorruptible. So, according to the above assertion of Anselm's from *Reply V,* the angel does exist after all! In short, we have, bizarrely, an ontological argument for the existence of every possible angel—indeed, for every possible incorruptible substance—contrary to Anselm's explicit assertion that his argument applies only to *G*. It will not do to suggest that a mediaeval thinker such as Anselm would have said only of an

actually existent thing that it "is" a necessary being, or that it "is" not able not to exist. That is perhaps true. But then how are we to construe Anselm's claim? The only alternative is to take him as saying that whatever does not exist is such (is of such a nature) that *if* it were to exist, it *would* not be a necessary being. That, however, simply returns us to the original problem, since it is not true of some nonexistent angel that, if it were to exist, it would not be a "necessary being."

The second problematic claim occurs later in the *Reply* in a passage where Anselm reformulates his case for the existence of *G* so as to accommodate, if only for the sake of argument, certain claims that Gaunilo had made. Part of the reformulated argument runs as follows: "It is similarly possible to conceive what cannot not exist. Whoever conceives this conceives something greater than one who conceives what can not exist. So, when something than which a greater cannot be conceived is conceived, if what can not exist is conceived, something than which a greater cannot be conceived is not being conceived" (R 9). Anselm concludes that when one is conceiving *G,* one is conceiving something that cannot not exist—*and so G must exist*. This argument makes little sense on the modified Aristotelian reading of necessity. On such a reading, Anselm would be saying that an incorruptible thing is greater than a corruptible one, which is no doubt true—but then, bizarrely, inferring that such a thing must actually exist, because it "cannot not exist."

As far as I can see, the above two passages are the only ones in Anselm's writings that conflict with the modified Aristotelian reading. Nevertheless they are there, and they need to be accounted for. We have seen that Anselm often employs a notion of necessity that is conceptual or logical, rather than natural. One suggestion might therefore be that in these two passages, uniquely, Anselm employs a logical or absolute sense of necessity in connection with existence. This, however, is implausible. As we saw in the previous chapter, there are several passages where Anselm contrasts what is possible (or what "can" be) with what is conceivable. Here is one of them again: "For if anyone should say that something than which a greater cannot be conceived is not something that exists in reality, or that it is able not to exist, or even that it can be conceived not to exist, he can easily be refuted" (R 5). It should be clear by now, I trust, that "is able not to exist" does *not* express logical or absolute possibility. The very next sentence in Anselm's text, however, is one of our two recalcitrant sentences: "For what does not exist is able not to exist." It is surely beyond belief that Anselm would have switched between two different senses of possibility in two consecutive sentences

without any warning. We must, therefore, finally set aside even the modified Aristotelian interpretation, at least as it stands, as a complete account of Anselm's understanding of necessity and possibility, even in the passages that are relevant to us. So, precisely what understanding of possibility and necessity did Anselm have? Fortunately, we do not have to rely merely on an appreciation of the general intellectual climate in which Anselm was working to determine an answer to this question, since he himself provides a number of explicit discussions of possibility and necessity. We need, therefore, to turn to them. What we then find is (not surprisingly) something not very far removed from the modified Aristotelian view.

According to Anselm, to say that something "can" or "is able to" do or be something is, strictly speaking, to say that the thing possesses a certain *power* or *ability.* This was the absolutely standard view in the tradition that Anselm was working in. As Augustine put it, "Just as whoever wills possesses will, so whoever is able possesses power [*habet . . . potestatem qui potest*]" (*De spir. et lit.* 31.53). About a century before Anselm, Gerbert states that it is unintelligible that someone should walk without the ability *(potestas)* to walk (*De rationali,* 161A). Although Gerbert stresses the unintelligibility of denying power to a thing when it does something, he is not asserting the triviality that if an agent does something, it is logically possible for him to do it. He, like Augustine, is making a substantive metaphysical claim. He is asserting that if an agent does something, there must be some *ontological ground* in the nature of the agent that renders this act possible. It is the denial of this metaphysical conviction that Gerbert is claiming to be unintelligible. Anselm is reflecting this same conviction when he states that without an ability *(potestas)* a thing is not able to be or do anything at all (CD 12).

So far this is merely an expression of (perhaps modified) Aristotelianism. What is novel in Anselm is his discussion of certain uses of the terms "can" and "cannot" that, although acceptable, and indeed true, are nevertheless misleading and strictly improper, because they do not directly map on to an ability or an incapacity. On one occasion Anselm gives the example of Hector and Achilles to illustrate his point. We say that Hector was able to be vanquished by Achilles, and that Achilles was not able to be vanquished by Hector. Yet, observes Anselm, "there was no lack of power [*impotentia*] in him who could not be vanquished, but in him who could not vanquish" (V 8). Commenting on this example elsewhere he writes that

"to be able to be vanquished is not a power [*potestas*], but an incapacity; and not being able to be vanquished is not an incapacity, but a power" (CDH 2.17). Such improprieties are common: "From an impropriety of speaking it very often happens that we say that a thing *is able,* not because that thing is able, but because another thing is able; and that a thing that is able is not able because another thing is not able. So, if I say, 'A book can be written by me,' the book can indeed do nothing—but I can write the book. And when we say that this person cannot be vanquished by that one, we understand nothing else than that that person cannot vanquish this one" (CD 12). The important point in all this for us is that even when something is improperly said to be able to do something, some related thing does actually possess some relevant power; and similarly for an improperly ascribed inability and a corresponding incapacity. As Anselm puts it, "Many things are said to be able not from their own but from another's power; and many are said not to be able not from their own but from another's incapacity" (CD 12). Note that Anselm is not suggesting that these improper statements are not true. They are; and Anselm himself frequently asserts them without qualification. It is rather that we should not be misled about what makes them true.

Anselm explicitly applies this understanding of ability and inability to statements about God. His concern is to preserve God's omnipotence in the face of many true statements about what God "cannot" do. Some of the examples employed by Anselm himself are: God cannot lie or sin; He cannot die or suffer corruption (P 7; CDH 2.11; CD 12). Despite the truth of such assertions Anselm insists that inability is never strictly to be applied to God. He can maintain this because assertions such as these, despite their "surface grammar," are not really ascribing inabilities to God, since what is being denied of God are various sorts of imperfection; and it is these that genuinely signify a lack of power. The more you are "able" to do any of them—lie, die, etc.—the more "adversity and perversity" have a power over you, and the less power you have over them. Whoever is "able" to do such things "is able not through power [*potentia*], but through lack of power [*impotentia*]" (P 7). Elsewhere Anselm puts the matter as follows: "Whenever God is said to be unable, no power in Him is being denied, but an unconquerable power and strength is being signified. For nothing else is understood than that nothing is able to bring it about that He does what He is being denied the ability to do" (CDH 2.17). As with the case of Achilles, who is said not to be "able" to be vanquished, an improperly ascribed incapacity is related to a genuine incapacity in something else.

So, to return to our central concern, when Anselm says of *G* that it cannot not exist (R 5, 9), he regards this as a strictly improper way of expressing something true, since what is ascribed to *G* is surpassing power and greatness. The incapacity lies in other things: no such thing has the power to bring it about that *G* does not exist. There is no question of the misleading but true statement that *G cannot not exist* being a matter of logical impossibility. It has rather to do with the *aseity* and *ontological independence* that belongs to *G*. It exists in such a way and with such a nature that nothing can destroy it. It is, as Anselm says in a related context, "steadfast" in its existence (CDH 2.17). This is the least we should expect from the broadly Aristotelian background to Anselm's thought. Possibilities and incapacities are referred back, ontologically, to some actually existing nature as their ground.

Perhaps the most conclusive evidence that this was Anselm's view is to be found in his discussions of possibilities for not-yet-existent objects. Consider some actual being before it exist. Was it possible for it to exist? From the perspective of logical necessity the answer is straightforward. Of course it was possible, because it was eventually actual. Anselm, however, thinks that a substantive metaphysical issue lurks here. In *De casu diaboli XII* the Pupil refers to the Boethian, ultimately Aristotelian, distinction that I signalled above in terms of "actuated" and "nonactuated" capacities: "I know that there are two abilities [*potestates*]: one that is not yet in actuality [*in re*], another that now exists in actuality." Anselm, in the figure of the Teacher, is happy to accept without qualification that if something now exists, it "can" exist: "Everything that exists, in virtue of existing, is able to exist." He doubts, however, that a thing was able to exist before it existed. The Pupil expresses himself puzzled by the suggestion that there is any problem here: "But I cannot fail to know this: that if something is able to exist in as much as it now does exist, then if at some time it did not exist, before it existed it was able to exist. *For if it was not able to exist, it never would exist.*" This is just what the Teacher denies, or at least does not accept without qualification. Strictly speaking, Anselm urges, it is false to say that this thing, before it exists, "can" exist: "Do you think that what is nothing has absolutely nothing, and therefore has no ability [*potestas*]; and without ability it is capable [*potest*] of absolutely nothing?" That one is meant to assent to this is clear from what immediately follows in the dialogue—especially from the Teacher's categorical statement a few lines later that such a thing (specifically the world) "was capable of absolutely nothing before it existed." Such a scruple would be wholly misplaced if a merely logical sense of possibility

were in question. What is worrying Anselm is the suggestion that a nonexistent should possess any *power* or *capacity*. He is, in Kantian terminology, disallowing the application of a "real predicate" to any such nonentity.

Surely, though, if a not-yet-existent thing is not able to exist, its existence is impossible: so it cannot be that it exists now! This is just how the Pupil responds: "If it was not able to exist, it was impossible that it should exist at some time." Anselm accommodates the Pupil's view by concluding that "it was both possible and impossible [*possibile et impossibile*] before it existed." What is important for us is the way Anselm explicates the sense in which it *was* possible for this thing to exist. His procedure precisely parallels that of his treatment of improper ascriptions of abilities to already existent things. What he does is to refer an improperly ascribed ability to some *other* subject—as when we refer Hector's "ability" to be vanished to Achilles's power to vanquish him. In the present case, Anselm claims that when something nonexistent is said to be able to exist, what is meant is that something else possesses the power to bring the former thing into existence—something else that must itself actually exist, of course, in order to possess such power: "Whatever does not exist is not, before it exists, able to exist by its own power; but if some other thing can bring it about that it exists, in this way it can exist through another's power." When what is in question is the whole world, the power in question must be located in God: "Therefore the world exists because God, before the world came to be, was able to make it, not because the world itself was beforehand able to exist" (CD 12).[18]

Anselm's handling of improper ascriptions of inabilities is mirrored by his handling of improper ascriptions of necessity. Strictly speaking, necessity expresses either compulsion *(coactio)* or prevention *(prohibitio)* (e.g., CDH 2.10, 2.17). Elsewhere Anselm says that it expresses *violentia* (F 342). It is entirely proper to say of the heavens that they revolve necessarily or by necessity, because a natural compulsion "forces" them to revolve (CDH 2.17). Not surprisingly, Anselm refuses to allow that any such notion properly applies to God. Such hostility to applying the notion of necessity to God had a long tradition behind it, stretching back to the early Church Fathers.[19] The fundamental conviction was that this would be to subject Him Who is above all things to some alien necessity. Anselm himself could not be firmer on the point: necessity is not to be applied to God at all, since all necessity is subject to His will (CDH 2.17). Nevertheless, Anselm allows that truths about God can be expressed, albeit somewhat misleadingly and improperly, by using the language of necessity. Indeed, he himself freely uses such language. God is, for example, necessarily free of the nature and

the law that governs what He has created (M 22); "inevitable necessity demands" that God is absent from no place or time (ibid.); it is a necessity that God always speak the truth (CDH 2.17); and He is necessarily immortal (C 1.2). Nevertheless, there is in truth no necessity—that is, compulsion—here. Writing of the "good things" that God possesses *a se,* Anselm writes that God possesses them "not from any necessity, but . . . from a peculiar [*propria*] and eternal immutability" (CDH 2.10). The following is his most extended statement of the matter:

> When, however, we say that something necessarily is or is not the case with God, it is not to be understood that there is any necessity that either compels or prevents; what is meant is that in everything else there is a necessity that prevents them from doing, and compels them not to do, what is contrary to what is said of God. For when we say that it is necessary that God always speak the truth, and necessary that He never lie, nothing else is meant than that there is in Him such a steadfastness for maintaining the truth that it is necessary that nothing is able to make Him not speak the truth or lie (CDH 2.17).

As with improper statements of inability, the truth of an improper ascription of necessity to a subject does indeed involve some subject or other being genuinely necessitated or forced: it is just that it is some subject other than the one to which the improper ascription is made.

Nothing in the above contains any suggestion that Anselm saw the truth or acceptability of statements that predicate something necessarily of God as having anything to do with what is logically necessary. Nevertheless, Jonathan Barnes (1972: 25) goes too far when he suggests that for Anselm "God necessarily exists" does not entail "God exists."[20] If we analyze the statement that God is unable not to exist (or necessarily exists) along the lines laid down by Anselm, what we get is the statement that in all things other than God there is a necessity that prevents them from doing, and compels them not to do, what is contrary to God's existing. Now, although it is true, as Barnes *(loc. cit.)* observes, that "Nothing has the power to bring it about that God does not exist" does not entail "God exists," Barnes ignores the fact that Anselm requires that there always be a power to ground such incapacities or lack of power. The genuine necessity that is implied by the sentences that improperly attribute necessity to God is one that compels other things. And this compulsion must derive from something. What it derives from, of course, is God: specifically from His "steadfastness" and

power. But God must *exist* in order to possess such power. So according to Anselm the truth of the statement that God cannot not exist presupposes that God does actually exist—with consummate power. Necessarily, such a statement is true only if God exists; and so in this sense entails God's existence. The full Anselmian reconstruction of "God exists necessarily" is: "God exists with such absolute power that everything is prevented from making it the case that God does not exist."[21] Barnes's suggestion is, indeed, straightforwardly contradicted by a passage that led us in the first place to question the modified Aristotelian interpretation of Anselm: "What does not exist is able not to exist" (R 5). Contraposition gives us the thesis that what is not able not to exist does exist; and we know that Anselm accepted the equivalence of *not possibly not P* and *necessarily P*. These two together then deliver the thesis that *what necessarily exists exists*.[22] The element of truth in Barnes's claim is that an inference from necessary existence (or an inability not to exist) to actual existence is no merely logical inference for Anselm. It is one that is metaphysically grounded. Nevertheless, given such grounding, the inference is secure.

Where does this leave us in our attempt to understand what Anselm means when he says that whatever does not exist is able not to exist? This claim is, we now see, doubly improper in Anselm's eyes. It treats as an ability what is in fact an imperfection: ontological weakness, as it were. And it ascribes it to a nonexistent. When this improper manner of expression is tidied up in accordance with Anselm's instructions, we see that it is far from expressing any triviality of modal logic. Indeed, Anselm's contention expresses a claim that is utterly perplexing from a merely logical point of view. Anselm's contention expresses the idea that if something is able not to exist (i.e., it is possible for it not to exist), *something else does exist!* If it follows from the fact that something does not exist that it "can" (albeit in an improper sense) not exist, something is required to possess a power so that this (improper) ascription of ability can be properly grounded.[23] This is close to the modified Aristotelian tradition in which abilities are construed in terms of powers and capacities that require bearers. Anselm goes beyond this tradition, however, in his extension of it to handle nonexistents.

What is important for us is that this extension prevents Anselm from regarding anything other than God as being a "necessary being." Recall Anselm's discussion of things that do not yet exist, but that will. They are "able" to exist because and only because they are of such a nature that something else has the power to bring them into existence. And they are "able" not to exist because and only because they are of such a nature that

something else has the power to prevent them from existing. But for Anselm it is true of *anything* other than God that at some point it did not exist, because of Creation. Every created (indeed creatable) thing therefore has a nature that marks it as something that "is able" not to exist. This is also indicated by the fact that God can reduce the whole of creation to nothing (LA 8). In short, nothing other than God possesses that absolute "steadfastness" that excludes any other thing from having power over it, and that alone makes it the case that it "cannot not exist." We have seen that certain traditional figures, such as Aquinas, managed to retain a modified Aristotelian account of possibility and necessity while rejecting the original equation of necessity and eternity (or sempiternity). For Aquinas certain things are necessary beings even though they were created and even though God could allow them to fall into nothingness. Anselm's way of extending modal notions to nonexistents undercuts such possibilities.

In the previous chapter we considered at some length various passages in which Anselm contrasts possibility and conceivability. I cited one of them earlier in the present chapter: "For if anyone should say that something than which a greater cannot be conceived is not something that exists in reality, or that it is able not to exist, *or even* that it can be conceived not to exist, he can easily be refuted" (R 5). If what I have recently been arguing is correct, the intended contrast here may seem puzzling. For what we have discovered is that for Anselm what is able not to exist and what can be conceived not to exist *are co-extensive*. Everything other than God is able not to exist, as we have just seen; and everything other than God can be conceived not to exist (P3, 22). The answer to this puzzle lies in the fact that the two notions are coextensive *only if God (or G) actually exists*.[24] God is omnipotent (CDH 2.11) and so can effect whatever we can conceive—so long as such "effecting" is the exercise of genuine power. God is "in no way prevented from doing anything" (CDH 2.5). The only things that God "cannot" do, as we have seen, are things that in the ultimate analysis evince weakness (P 7). So, just to focus on the issue that is our central concern: if we can so much as conceive a thing's nonexistence, that thing "is able" not to exist (albeit in an improper way of expressing the matter), since there is at least God who actually has the power to render the thing nonexistent. But suppose there is no God. Then all powers and abilities are—or, if they are improperly ascribed, are explicable in terms of—*natural* powers and

abilities. Our ability to conceive certainly outstrips these. Consider, for example, Anselm's claim that whatever is composite can be decomposed either actually or "by the mind"—that is, can be conceived to be decomposed (P 18; EIV 4). Since the "ability" to be decomposed is an ontological weakness, we have an improper though true ascription of ability. What this signifies is that something in existence has a power to decompose the thing. But this is *all* that such an "ability" immediately entails. Of itself it implies nothing about whether God exists and has such power. If God is left out of the picture, the "ability" in question implies that a composite thing can be decomposed by some *natural process* or other. In other words, when God is left out of the picture, Anselm's account of (improper) abilities reduces to the modified Aristotelian account. And yet someone who thought that a certain composite thing could not possibly be decomposed by any natural process would doubtless claim to be able to *conceive* a decomposition of the thing. Such, for example, is the position of traditional (philosophical) atomism. Given that *being able to be* and *being conceived to be* are co-extensive only if God exists, and that they will be *recognized* to be co-extensive only by someone who understands that God exists, and understands the true basis of attributions of capacities, it is wholly intelligible that Anselm should contrast the notions, since they are different notions. That this is the dialectical situation is made clear by a passage in which Anselm claims that God can neither exist nor be conceived without power; nor can He either be decomposed or be conceived to be decomposed (EIV 7). Since it is God Himself who is here in question, the issue of whether He can be decomposed refers us to the question whether anything *other than God* has a power to decompose Him. Someone may well be happy to accept that there is no such thing, and therefore to accept that God "cannot" be decomposed—and yet claim to be able at least to *conceive* God to be decomposed. Indeed, in the passage in question Anselm implies that this would be the correct attitude if God had any parts. So, when Anselm writes of someone who claims that *G* is able not to exist *or even* can be conceived not to exist, the contrast is wholly intelligible. It is intelligible because there may well be those who accept that there is no external power to which *G* is subject, but that *G* can nevertheless be conceived not to exist. Anselm, of course, believes that such a position is ultimately incoherent. But that there may well be people who hold such a position—people who have not thought these matters through to the end as acutely as Anselm—makes Anselm's procedure wholly intelligible.

There is, however, one final problem. It resides in the fact that when we take Anselm's whole view of things into account—including the actual

existence of God—possible nonexistence in Anselm's sense and conceivable nonexistence are indeed co-extensive—whereas possible nonexistence in this sense seems *not* to be co-extensive with the *absolute* possibility of not existing. This apparent mismatch arises from the fact that all of Anselm's assertions about what is possible are ultimately grounded on what is actually the case; whereas what is absolutely possible concerns all "possible worlds." According to Anselm, if something is "able" not to exist, something actually exists that has a power over it. If nothing exists that has any power over X, X "cannot" not exist. Moreover, if it is inconceivable that anything should have any power over X, X cannot even be conceived not to exist. In one passage Anselm states that if something exists without beginning, without end, if it is such that its existence is not strung out through time but is possessed all together (i.e., is "eternal" in the traditional sense), if it cannot possibly be caused to change, and lacks nothing, then this thing is that than which a greater cannot be conceived (R 8). Since Anselm holds that something than which a greater cannot be conceived cannot be conceived not to exist, it follows that the ontological attributes in question suffice for something not to be conceivably nonexistent. Elsewhere Anselm is even more explicit, and claims that God cannot be conceived not to exist precisely *because* of such attributes (P 22). The attributes in question are understood by Anselm to be such that it is not even conceivable that anything should have any power over a being that possesses them. But surely: even if such a being did exist, it is "logically possible" that it should not have. Does this not show that Anselm's notion of inconceivability is weaker than that of "logical" impossibility? In fact it shows no such thing. When Anselm says that the nonexistence of such a causally autonomous, eternal being is inconceivable, he means that its nonexistence is *absolutely* impossible. What these remarks of Anselm show, if they show anything, is that he is making a mistake—a rather gross mistake, it may seem. This issue in fact takes us to the very heart of Anselm's thought in this whole area, and it will occupy us later. Perhaps it will emerge that Anselm is not making such a gross mistake after all.

4

THE *PROSLOGION III* ARGUMENT

The first half of Anselm's *Proslogion III* contains an argument that both Malcolm and Hartshorne focused on as providing the principal evidence for their claim that Anselm propounded a version of the Modal Ontological Argument. In this chapter we shall investigate whether such an argument is to be found there, perhaps implicitly. As I have already mentioned, there is an issue concerning precisely how the passage in question is to be translated. Here it is in the well-known Charlesworth translation—though I replace Charlesworth's "thought" with my preferred "conceived":

> And certainly this being so truly exists that it cannot be even conceived not to exist. For something can be conceived to exist that cannot be conceived not to exist, and this is greater than that which can be conceived not to exist. Hence, if that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-conceived can be conceived not to exist, then that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-conceived is not the same as that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-conceived, which is absurd. Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-conceived exists so truly then, that it cannot be even conceived not to exist.

Malcolm and Hartshorne claim three things. First, that this passage in effect contains an argument for *G*'s existence that is independent of the argument of *Proslogion II.* Second, that this argument is a Modal Ontological Argument. Third, that the argument is sound. In this chapter we shall be primarily, though not exclusively, concerned with the first of these three issues, since it claims priority. Given that a Modal Ontological Argument would be independent of the argument of *Proslogion II,* if *Proslogion III* does

not contain an independent argument for the existence of *G,* it cannot contain a modal argument, sound or not.

The vast majority of scholars who have addressed themselves to this first issue have maintained that there is no independent argument for the existence of *G* in this passage, because Anselm is not arguing here for the existence of *G* at all. What Anselm is offering, they claim, is a demonstration of the *way* in which *G* must exist. It was a standard traditional view that God is distinctive—"qualitatively different" from anything worldly, as it is sometimes put—not merely in virtue of His possession of certain attributes, but because His very mode of existence is radically different from the mode of existence of anything else. It is simply this, the critics maintain, that Anselm is emphasizing and demonstrating in the present passage, though with reference to *G.* This can be done while prescinding from the question whether *G* actually exists, since we can raise the issue in the following merely hypothetical way: Is it necessarily the case that if *G* existed, it would exist in a certain unique way? It is such a way of existing, the suggestion is, that Anselm is adverting to when he states as the conclusion of his argument that *G exists so truly* that it cannot be conceived not to exist. Existing in such a way is later identified by Anselm with existing eternally.

In Anselm's text the issue is not, indeed, handled in a merely conditional manner. The conclusion of the argument is to the effect that *G* so truly exists that it cannot be conceived not to exist. But if *G exists* so truly that it cannot be conceived not to exist, *G* exists. There is no question here of prescinding from the issue of existence. This, however, the suggestion continues, is simply because Anselm has in *Proslogion II* just demonstrated, to his own satisfaction at least, the actual existence of *G.* Actual existence is part of the conclusion of the *Proslogion III* argument only because this argument builds upon, and throughout assumes the conclusion of, *Proslogion II.* The only new, independent claim that Anselm intended to make in *Proslogion III* concerns *G*'s mode of existence.

As far as Anselm's intentions are concerned, this interpretation is in my view indisputably correct. There is no indication whatever in the text that Anselm felt he was presenting an independent argument for the existence of *G.* It is perhaps worth mentioning that in the manuscripts there were no breaks between the sections of the work, as there are in modern editions, filled in by a section heading.[1] Moreover, what Charlesworth translates as "this being" is in Anselm's original Latin a simple pronoun—*"quod"* ("which")—and it is the first word in *Proslogion III.* In other words, starting with the last sentence of *Proslogion II,* Anselm's original text would have

read as follows (in my translation): "Without doubt, therefore, something than which a greater cannot be conceived exists both in the understanding and in reality. Which, certainly, so truly exists that it cannot be even conceived not to exist." Anselm is obviously making a new claim about the *G* that was shown to exist in *Proslogion II,* and is not presenting a second demonstration of its existence. So, Anselm's train of thought is clear and straightforward. In *Proslogion II* Anselm had demonstrated that *G* actually exists; and in *Proslogion III* he demonstrates something further about it.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that there is not an independent argument for the actual existence of *G* lurking in this passage. What Anselm wrote, that is to say, may in fact *constitute* an independent argument for the existence of *G,* even though this was not Anselm's intention. As I mentioned in the Introduction, Norman Malcolm explicitly distanced himself from the suggestion that Anselm intended to offer an independent argument here. If we can find such an argument lying, perhaps implicitly, in what Anselm wrote, that will be discovery enough. What I shall argue in this chapter is that nothing resembling the Modal Ontological Argument is to be found in *Proslogion III,* however implicitly; and the argument it does contain is not independent of *Proslogion II.*

Anselm's argument begins (to revert to Charlesworth's translation, though continuing with my replacement of "thought" by "conceived") with a statement of its conclusion: "And certainly this being [*sc. G,* the subject of the immediately preceding *Proslogion II*] so truly exists that it cannot be even conceived not to exist." It is the second sentence of *Proslogion III* that inaugurates the actual argument for this conclusion. Indeed, this second sentence is Anselm's sole explicit premise; so it is essential that we construe it correctly. As we have seen, Charlesworth renders it as follows: "For something can be conceived to exist that cannot be conceived not to exist, and this is greater than that which can be conceived not to exist." The first clause of this sentence considered by itself is ambiguous. It could be taken as asserting that there actually is something in existence that can be conceived, but that cannot be conceived not to exist. If there is an independent argument for the existence of *G* in *Proslogion III,* this cannot be what Anselm is asserting. This is because Anselm himself firmly believes that there is (and can be) only one thing that cannot be conceived not to exist: namely, *G.* Given this, why on earth should Anselm expect his intended audience—the Fool—to grant that there is actually something that cannot be conceived not to exist? If the Fool does not accept that *G* exists, he would in Anselm's own eyes be wrong to accept any such thing. We have

already agreed, of course, that Anselm did not set out to prove the existence of *G* in this passage. Nevertheless, if what Anselm wrote can be read as at least implicitly containing an independent argument for the existence of *G,* this argument will have to be assessed with as much rigour as if it had been explicitly presented. More precisely, the implicit modal argument, if there is one, must be sustained in an acceptable way by claims that Anselm actually makes in this passage. Moreover, even if we suppose that there is *not* an independent argument for the existence of *G* lurking in *Proslogion III,* this reading of Anselm's premise is intrinsically implausible for two reasons. First, if Anselm is presupposing that the existence of *G* has just been demonstrated in *Proslogion II,* why does he phrase his premise so abstractly? Why claim merely that something—something or other—that actually exists cannot be conceived not to exist? Since on this reading we all know that it is specifically *G* that is in question, why not be "up front" about the matter? Anselm on this construal is being strangely and inexplicably reticent. Second, the reference to the thing's conceivability—"For something *can be conceived to exist* that . . ."—would be perplexingly redundant. If our basis for accepting that some actual something or other cannot be conceived not to exist is our acceptance that specifically *G* is such, then *obviously* we are dealing with something that can be conceived to exist, since this is involved in our accepting that *G* actually exists. Much more reasonable, therefore, is the other reading of Charlesworth's ambiguous sentence, according to which the "something" is within the scope of a certain conceiving. What on this reading is being claimed by Anselm is that, even if no such thing actually exists, we can at least conceive of the following: *something that cannot be conceived not to exist.*

The clause from *Proslogion III* that we have been considering reads as follows in the original Latin: *"Nam potest cogitari esse aliquid quod non possit cogitari non esse."*[2] So far we have been following Charlesworth in taking the subject of *"potest"* ("can") to be *"aliquid"* ("something"): "For something can be conceived to exist that cannot be conceived not to exist." By contrast, Robert Merrihew Adams (1971a: 49) takes the verb *"potest"* to be used impersonally: "For it can be thought that there exists something which cannot be thought not to exist." Hopkins and Richardson (1974–6) concur: "For there can be thought to exist something which cannot be thought not to exist."[3] Although these readings do not, as far as I can see, differ materially from Charlesworth's (when the latter is read in the second way distinguished above), a couple of considerations count against Charlesworth's rendering.[4] First, the "impersonal" reading has in its favour the fact that it

echoes the phrasing of *Proslogion II* in a way that was likely to have been intended by Anselm. *Proslogion II*'s "something than which nothing greater can be conceived" is echoed by *Proslogion III*'s "something that cannot be conceived not to exist." (In the original Latin the two constructions are even closer: *"aliquid quo"* and *"aliquid quod."*) Second, the impersonal reading is not ambiguous in the way that Charlesworth's is. I shall, therefore, at least for the time being, adopt the impersonal reading. I propose the following as the first half of Anselm's single premise: "It is possible to conceive that something exists that cannot be conceived not to exist."

Let us now consider the second clause of Anselm's premise: *". . . quod maius est quam quod non esse cogitari potest"*—which is rendered by Charlesworth as ". . . and this is greater than that which can be conceived not to exist." It is worth making three points about this clause. First, the reference of the initial "this" is not ambiguous. It does *not* refer to the condition of not being conceivably nonexistent. Anselm is not comparing the greatness of *not being conceivably nonexistent* with the greatness of *being so conceivable*. He is, rather, comparing the things themselves that can be so characterized. This becomes clear when we note that Anselm is claiming that something is greater than *that which* can be conceived not to exist. Here Anselm is obviously referring to an *object*—perhaps a mere conceived-of or intentional object—that can be conceived not to exist, rather than to the condition of being conceivably nonexistent. What it is being contrasted with, therefore, must be an (intentional or conceived-of) object, and not a condition. Comparing an object and a condition in terms of greatness would make little sense.

The second point concerns the connection between the two clauses in Anselm's premise. The first clause, as we are interpreting it at the moment, claims that we can conceive the following: *something that cannot be conceived not to exist*. The second clause tells us that this thing is greater than anything that can be conceived not to exist. Most interpreters take Anselm to make this second claim on the grounds that *whatever* cannot be conceived not to exist is greater than anything that can be so conceived. Richard La Croix (1972: 54), however, claims both that Anselm explicitly says no such thing in this argument (which is true), and also that Anselm is not even implicitly relying on it when he asserts the second clause. All that this second clause states is that the "something" of the first clause—something that cannot be conceived not to exist—is greater than anything that can be conceived not to exist. Anselm gives absolutely no reason why this is so. As far as what is explicitly stated in the argument goes, it may be that this

superiority is unrelated to the issue of conceivable nonexistence. Indeed, Anselm's actual argument leaves it open that there may be something that cannot be conceived not to exist that is *not* greater than something that can be conceived not to exist. In case it is not clear why this remains open as a possibility, I should point out that the first clause of Anselm's premise is still ambiguous. Since what is in question is a possibly nonexistent intentional object, this object may be less than fully determinate in nature. One possibility is that Anselm is supposing that the following exhausts the content of the conception in question: *something that exists that cannot be conceived not to exist.* On the other hand, it may be that Anselm has something more specific in mind. It may be that he is claiming that we can conceive of something with a specific nature N which both exists and is such that it cannot be conceived not to exist—doubtless because it is N. If this is what Anselm meant, when he goes on to state that this conceivable something is greater than whatever can be conceived not to exist, this greatness may derive from N rather than from the fact that it cannot be conceived not to exist. Furthermore, Anselm's first clause, as we are currently interpreting it, does not state that there is *only one* conceivable object that cannot be conceived not to exist. Suppose, then, that there are several—X, Y, and Z—that differ with respect to their natures. For all that Anselm says, it may be that some of these—Y and Z, say—are *not* greater than anything that can be conceived not to exist, whereas X is. The suggestion is not that Anselm actually accepted this as a possibility. He clearly states that there is only one thing that cannot be conceived not to exist. The point is, rather, that Anselm does not exclude this possibility here in the premise of the argument of *Proslogion III.*

It is perhaps worth noting that Anselm can still reach the conclusion that *G* cannot be conceived not to exist even if La Croix is right. In the first clause of his premise Anselm states that we can conceive at least one thing that cannot be conceived not to exist. Perhaps there are several. Anselm's second clause, according to La Croix, then simply says of (at least) one of these things, X, that it is greater than anything that can be conceived not to exist. On this reading, these two clauses taken together say, and say no more than, that at least one thing, X, can be conceived to exist that *both* cannot be conceived not to exist *and* is greater than anything that can be conceived not to exist. Since, obviously, nothing is greater than *G* (since nothing greater is even conceivable), *G* cannot be one of the things that can be conceived not to exist—for then X would be greater than it. So *G* cannot be conceived not to exist.

La Croix's suggestion must, however, be rejected for three reasons. In the first place, the second clause of Anselm's premise now lacks any justification. Why should we believe that anything, even if it is just something that is merely conceivable, is greater than anything that can be conceived not to exist? If, as on the usual interpretation, Anselm believed (and believed that it was pretty obvious) that whatever cannot be conceived not to exist is greater than whatever can be so conceived, the justification for the second clause is clear. According to the present suggestion, however, we are given no reason whatsoever *why* it should be that something is greater than anything that can be conceived not to exist. In the second place, the syntax of Anselm's premise would be strangely inept if Anselm is not implying that *whatever* cannot be conceived to exist is greater than whatever can be so conceived. In particular, the "which" *(quod)* that begins the second clause is inappropriate, because its reference is not properly determined. This second clause at least states that some conceivable thing is greater than anything that can be conceived not to exist. But which thing? The initial *"quod"* is supposed to tell us; and this pronoun of course refers back to the preceding clause. The preceding clause simply says that it is possible to conceive of something existing that cannot be conceived not to exist. Perhaps there are several such. Moreover, according to La Croix, it is left open that some of these are *not* greater than anything that can be conceived not to exist. So what is the "which" of the second clause referring to? It cannot be to just *any* of these things that cannot be conceived not to exist (or to *such a thing,* which would make syntactic sense), since the second clause states that the thing in question is greater than anything that can be conceived not to exist, whereas our Y and Z above are not. Among the things that cannot be conceived not to exist there is, if the second clause is to make any sense, at least one that is also (and, supposedly, unrelatedly) greater than anything that can be conceived not to exist. But a simple "which" at the beginning of the second clause is inadequate to the task of picking out this thing (or these things) in particular.

The most decisive objection to La Croix's proposal, however, is that it renders the conclusion of Anselm's argument totally unjustified. As I have indicated, if La Croix were right, Anselm would certainly be able to infer that *G* cannot be conceived not to exist. But this is not Anselm's conclusion. His conclusion is that *G exists so truly that* it cannot be conceived not to exist. The appearance in the conclusion of this notion of existing "so truly" is puzzling from the logical point of view, since it appears nowhere in Anselm's premise. Nor does it appear in the course of his argument. It

simply pops up in the conclusion. The only possible explanation of this is that Anselm held (and held it to be obvious) that something cannot be conceived not to exist *only if* it exists with a certain superlative degree of "truth." Moreover, the precise construction involving the notion of truth that Anselm employs—existing "so truly that" the thing cannot be conceived not to exist—indicates that a thing's existing with such truth *guarantees* that it cannot be conceived not to exist. So, Anselm is treating the notions of existing with a certain degree of truth and of not being conceivably nonexistent as *mutually entailing*. This means, however, that Anselm cannot, unless he was totally confused, have left it open in his premise that it may not be the case that *everything* that cannot be conceived not to exist is greater than anything that can be so conceived. For this is inconsistent with the mutual entailment that Anselm relies on in drawing his conclusion. To illustrate this, let us suppose that something A cannot be conceived not to exist, but that it is not greater than something B that can be so conceived. From the mutual entailment just noted it follows that A, since it cannot be conceived not to exist, exists with the requisite degree of "truth," and that B, since it can be conceived not to exist, lacks this degree of truth and exists less "truly." However, as I shall be explaining in more detail shortly, it is quite clear that Anselm treats the degrees of truth with which things exist as determining their relative greatness. If A exists more truly than B, A is greater than B. But we have just seen that A *does* exist more truly than B; and so it is greater. This, however, contradicts our initial assumption. It is clear, therefore, that even within the confines of the *Proslogion III* argument Anselm is relying on the claim that *whatever* cannot be conceived not to exist is greater than whatever can be conceived not to exist. The argument itself, taken with its conclusion, would simply not hang together otherwise. Because of this, although Anselm offers us a single premise with two clauses, we shall see the underlying structure of Anselm's argument more clearly if we regard the second clause as inferred from the first, together with a background assumption (or implicit premise) to the effect that whatever cannot be conceived not to exist is greater than anything that can be conceived not to exist.

Nevertheless, it is certainly true that when Anselm (implicitly) claims that whatever cannot be conceived not to exist is greater than anything that can be conceived not to exist, he is not presenting these facts about conceivability as the *ground* or *ultimate reason* for this difference in greatness. The real ground of such superiority is the degree of "truth" with which a thing exists. Moreover, possessing such truth to a certain degree is itself

the ground—the sole possible ground—of why something cannot be conceived not to exist. As Anselm puts it at one point, *G* cannot be conceived not to exist "*because* it exists with such a certain ground [*ratione*] of truth" (R 3). It is, not surprisingly, existing with specifically the *highest* degree of truth that guarantees that a thing cannot be conceived not to exist. It is, as Anselm puts it, a matter of existing "most truly" (P 3). Unlike the notion of not being conceivably nonexistent, Anselm's notion of existing with such "truth" is not even in part an epistemic notion, but is purely ontological. It is solely a matter of the manner in which something exists, or its mode of existence. As Anselm expresses the matter a little later, God "so exists" that He cannot be conceived not to exist (P 4).[5] Again, Anselm addresses the God who exists most truly in the following manner: "Of all things You have being to the greatest extent [*maxime omnium habes esse*]" (P 3). To exist in such a way, Anselm implies later, is to exist "absolutely" (P 22). In good Augustinian fashion, Anselm equates this with eternal (non-temporal) existence. Temporal beings, by contrast, "barely exist" (M 28).

As I have already mentioned, in several passages Anselm lays down a number of conditions that suffice for a thing to be conceivable as nonexistent. Since I shall frequently be referring to these important passages, I shall for handy reference dub them the "Conditions" passages. Here is one of them: "All and only those things can be conceived not to exist that have a beginning or an end or a conjunction of parts—and, as I have said, whatever is not a whole everywhere and always. That alone cannot be conceived not to exist in which there is neither beginning nor end nor conjunction of parts, and which thought discovers only as a whole always and everywhere" (R 4). As this passage makes clear, the conditions in question are not only individually sufficient for a thing to be conceivable as nonexistent, the list is presented as exhaustive. In other words, not meeting any of the conditions at all suffices for a thing *not* to be conceivable as nonexistent. Here is the longest of the Conditions passages:

> Without doubt, whatever does not exist at a certain place or at a certain time, even if it does exist at some place and some time or other, can be conceived not to exist at any place or at any time just as it does not exist at the certain place or at the certain time. For what did not exist yesterday but does today can be supposed [*subintelligi*] never to exist just as it is understood not to have existed yesterday. And what does not exist here but does exist there can be conceived not to exist anywhere just as it does not exist here. Similarly, if some individual

> parts of a thing do not exist where or when other parts do, all its parts, and hence the entire thing itself, can be conceived not to exist at any time or at any place. Now, even if it is said that time exists always, and the world everywhere, still, the former does not exist as a whole always, nor the latter as a whole everywhere. Just as individual parts of time do not exist when others do, so they can be conceived never to exist. And just as individual parts of the world do not exist where other parts do, so they can be supposed to exist nowhere . . . So, whatever does not exist at some place or at some time as a whole can, even if it does exist, be conceived not to exist. (R 1)[6]

As can be seen, an idea that dominates such Conditions passages is that of a thing existing *as a whole*. When taken in a temporal sense this echoes the Boethian *tota simul*. In other words, Anselm is saying that only an eternal, non-temporal being that exists "all at once" cannot be conceived not to exist. In case this is not sufficiently obvious from the two passages I have just cited, the following makes the matter plain:

> If something that has a beginning and an end is good, much better is that which, though it may begin, does not end. And just as the latter is better than the former, so something that has neither beginning nor end is better than the latter—even if it always passes from the past through the present to the future. Again, very much better than this is—whether something of this kind actually exists or not—that which in no way lacks anything, nor is forced to change or move. Now, cannot this be conceived? Or can we conceive of something greater than this? Is not this to form an idea [*conicere*] of that than which a greater cannot be conceived from those things than which a greater can be conceived? (R 8)

Here we have a delineation—partial, no doubt, but adequate to Anselm's purposes—of the actual nature of that than which a greater cannot be conceived. The final, crucial ascent to the conception of *G* is an ascent to a conception of something beyond time. We have gone beyond things—even things that have no beginning or end—that pass through time. Anselm is here discussing conditions that must be met for something to be *G,* rather than conditions for something not to be conceivable as nonexistent. Since, however, as Anselm repeatedly states (e.g., P 3, R 4), *G and G alone* cannot be conceived not to exist, the conditions for the one are the same as the conditions for the other.

As the last passage I have quoted indicates, eternity—in the traditional sense of being wholly outside or above time—is regarded by Anselm not merely as a necessary condition for not being conceivably nonexistent, but as sufficient. The move to non-temporality is in and of itself a move to *G*, and hence to something that cannot be conceived not to exist. None of the Conditions for conceivable nonexistence is explicitly mentioned as being absent, however. The only reasonable explanation of this is that Anselm believed that being eternal excludes all these Conditions. Some are obviously excluded. An eternal being cannot either begin or cease to exist. The case with some of the others may be felt to be less than self-evident. Anselm is, for example, committed to the view that an eternal being must be absolutely simple, and cannot be spatially circumscribed. We shall consider this matter in Chapter 6. For the moment, establishing Anselm's view on this matter is what is relevant.

So, Anselm was of the opinion that being eternal is both necessary and sufficient for not being conceivably nonexistent, which itself is both necessary and sufficient for being *G*. Moreover, to exist eternally (together with all that this entails) is to exist "most truly" or "maximally." We already know the last from *Monologion XXVIII* where we are told that temporal things "barely exist." But the point is also clearly made in the *Proslogion:* "For what is one thing as a whole and another in its parts, and in which there is anything mutable, is not entirely what it is. And what began to exist from not existing and can be conceived not to exist, and returns to not existing unless it subsists through something else; and what has been something that it now is not, and will be what it not yet is: that thing does not exist *properly and absolutely*. You, indeed, are what You are because whatever You are at any time or anywhere You are wholly and always" (P 22). This echoes the language of the Conditions passages, but here it is explicitly related to the notion of what it is to exist "properly and absolutely": that is, with supreme "truth." Putting all this together we arrive at the following inescapable conclusion: for Anselm, to exist with supreme truth is to exist externally, or outside time. It is specifically this manner of existing that constitutes the unsurpassable greatness of *G*. Strictly speaking, *G* is not unsurpassably great *because* it cannot be conceived not to exist, but because of its nature and, hence, its eternal mode of being. It is worthy of note that in the passage from the *Reply* that we considered above, where Anselm moves through various grades of excellence to a conception of that than which nothing greater can be conceived, not being conceivably nonexistent is not so much as mentioned as a "great-making" characteristic. Indeed, the very idea that

one thing's being greater than another could literally and ultimately consist in the fact that the one cannot and the other can be conceived not to exist has little sense. If one thing is greater than another, this has to do with what and how the things are. Nevertheless, the cognitive issue of conceivability is for Anselm indeed an *index*—an infallible index—of such ontological states of affairs, since (necessarily and a priori) something possesses such maximal greatness *if and only if* it cannot be conceived not to exist.

By way of my third and final comment on Anselm's premise I would like to emphasize that Anselm really is suggesting that anything that cannot be conceived not to exist is greater than *anything* that can be conceived not to exist. This fact is worth noting, because in this respect not being conceivably nonexistent differs from its counterpart—actual existence—in *Proslogion II.* Despite what a surprising number of commentators on Anselm have suggested, Anselm did not believe that anything that actually exists is greater than anything that exists merely in the mind.[7] Not only does Anselm never state or imply this, such an idea is refuted by two passages in the *Reply* to Gaunilo. The first is part of Anselm's case for claiming that his "ontological argument" works only for something than which a greater cannot be conceived, and specifically not for something that is greater than everything else: "For what if someone should say that something exists that is greater than everything [obviously: everything else] that exists, and yet that it can be conceived not to exist and that something greater than it can be conceived, even if this latter does not exist?" (R 5). Anselm states that there is no obvious way of refuting such a suggestion. What he is therefore allowing as a theoretical possibility is conceiving of some nonexistent thing that is greater than something that does exist—greater, indeed, than the greatest of existent things. It was sensible of Anselm not to have committed himself to the alternative. Is an actual cowpat greater than a nonexistent angel? Even those who are generally happy to make such ontological comparisons may well have no firm intuitions about a case where the nature of the nonexistent is so much greater than the nature of the existent. It is far from obvious that actual existence trumps other "great-making" considerations. In fact, Anselm was not simply noncommittal on this issue, as the second passage indicates. It is the one we have recently attended to, in which Anselm passes through a consideration of various grades of excellence until he arrives at a conception of something eternal than which nothing greater can be conceived. After having considered something that has no beginning or end, though it is temporal, Anselm writes: "Again, very much better than this is that which in no way

lacks anything, nor is forced to change or move—*whether something of this kind actually exists or not*" (R 8).[8] Here Anselm is expecting his readers to accept that an eternal being even if nonexistent is better than any temporal being.[9] Indeed, Anselm prefaces this laying out of the degrees of perfection by asking if anyone can disagree with it "even if he does not believe that what he conceives exists in reality." The whole series of comparisons, in other words, is between what may be merely conceived-of beings. It is, in fact, (essential) *natures* that Anselm is comparing. So, not only does existence not trump nonexistence, a higher nature trumps existence in relation to a lower nature. Hence, in *Proslogion II* Anselm restricts himself to comparing something nonexistent, something that exists "only in the intellect," with *the same thing* actually existent. Although actual existence does not trump other great-making "attributes," it does at least add to them. Inconceivable nonexistence, however, does trump every other (independent) consideration. This is because *only G* is not conceivably nonexistent. Hence, only that which has (or is) the greatest conceivable nature (in virtue of being eternal and absolutely simple) can exist in such a way that its nonexistence is inconceivable.[10]

Apart from his single premise—or, as I have suggested we interpret it, a premise, a background assumption, and an inference—Anselm's argument consists of a single sentence, after which he immediately draws his conclusion. The sentence in question reads as follows (in my translation): "Hence, if that than which a greater cannot be conceived can be conceived not to exist, that very thing than which a greater cannot be conceived is not that than which a greater cannot be conceived, which is inconsistent [*convenire non potest*]." One thing of note here is that Anselm has suddenly switched from "something than which [*aliquid quo*] a greater cannot be conceived" to "that than which [*id quo*] a greater cannot be conceived"—and even refers to "that very thing" *(id ipsum).* A similar move had been made in the preceding *Proslogion II* proof, where on two occasions Anselm made reference to *that than which* a greater cannot be conceived. Rather than supposing that Anselm, for no stated reason, suddenly starts assuming that there is at most one conceivable "something" than which a greater cannot be conceived, I follow the suggestion of Richard Campbell (1976:33) that the "that than which" formulation is intended by Anselm to introduce a claim that is meant to apply to *any* "something" than which a greater cannot be conceived.[11] So, in this second sentence of his argument Anselm is considering any arbitrary conceivable *G,* and he implicitly draws the intermediate conclusion that it—any such conceivable thing—cannot be conceived not

to exist. He does this through his favoured *reductio ad absurdum* way of arguing. It is pushed through on the basis of the trivially true claim that nothing is a conceivable *G* if something greater than it can be conceived. Anselm then draws his explicit conclusion that *G* exists so truly that it cannot be conceived not to exist. This, as we have seen, is based on a background thesis relating the impossibility of conceiving a thing's nonexistence to that thing's existing with maximal "truth." Note that the conclusion is about *something* than which a greater cannot be conceived, not *that* than which a greater cannot be conceived. Uniqueness is no part of the conclusion—something that supports the interpretation of Campbell that I have followed.

If we make explicit all the background assumptions and implicit inferences that Anselm makes, his brief argument in *Proslogion III* emerges as nothing short of the following:

1. It is possible to conceive of *G*. (Background Assumption)
2. If something can be conceived, then, if it cannot be conceived not to exist, this is because and only because it exists with maximal truth. (Background Assumption)
3. Anything that can be conceived but cannot be conceived not to exist is greater than anything conceivable that can be conceived not to exist. (Background Assumption, or implicit premise)
4. Nothing conceivable is a conceivable *G* if something greater than it can be conceived. (Trivial Truth)
5. It is possible to conceive of something X that exists and that cannot be conceived not to exist. (Premise)
6. This conceivable X is greater than anything conceivable that can be conceived not to exist. (From 3 and 5)
7. *G* can be conceived and can be conceived not to exist. (Assumption for *Reductio*)
8. X can be conceived and is greater than this conceivable *G*. (From 6 and 7)
9. This conceivable *G* is not a conceivable *G*. (From 4 and 8)
10. It is not the case both that *G* can be conceived and also that it can be conceived not to exist. (*Reductio,* since 9, which is an impossibility, is derived from 7, via 8)
11. *G* can be conceived and it cannot be conceived not to exist. (From 1 and 10)
12. *G* cannot be conceived not to exist because it exists with maximal truth. (From 2 and 11)

This final line is my rendering of Anselm's conclusion that *G* exists so truly that it cannot be conceived not to exist. It simply makes explicit the fact that Anselm regards existing with specifically maximal truth as what it takes to exist "so" truly.

Assuming for the time being that the above faithfully lays out Anselm's thinking in the first half of *Proslogion III,* let us see whether this argument is independent of *Proslogion II.* It clearly is, since nowhere does Anselm rely on the premise that *G* actually exists. So, it may seem that our first question has been answered: There *is* an independent argument for the existence of *G* contained, at least virtually, in *Proslogion III,* since the conclusion manifestly entails that *G* exists. Moreover, since the argument hinges on what is and what is not conceivable, it will, given the findings of Chapter 2, be possible to "translate" it into a modal idiom—with perhaps a certain amount of "tidying up." A modal reformulation of Anselm's argument as just construed will, however, not bear much resemblance to the sort of Modal Ontological Argument that is commonly discussed these days. The now-standard form of that argument, as we saw in Chapter 1, has just two premises. One is to the effect that a divine being possibly exists. The other is to the effect that necessarily, if such a being exists, it exists necessarily. After a bit of modal logic we deduce that a divine being actually and necessarily exists. About the first thing that leaps to the eye when we compare this argument with my formulation of Anselm's, even when we bear in mind an eventual modal "translation," is dissimilarity.[12] Much of this can be overcome, however. One reason for the dissimilarity is that Anselm is indulging in his favoured *reductio ad absurdum* manner of arguing for a conclusion, whereas the standard Modal Ontological Argument proceeds differently. This, however, is an insignificant difference. All we are really interested in is whether Anselm exhibits a certain conclusion as being entailed by certain premises, and whether the conclusion and the premises are analogous to those of the Modal Ontological Argument. The precise way in which this is exhibited is of incidental interest—so long, of course, as Anselm's conclusion is derived in a way that hinges on the notion of conceivability (which it clearly does). Another reason for the dissimilarity is that Anselm invokes the notion of something existing with maximal "truth," and relates it to conceivability. This difference too, however, can readily be explained away. Anselm starts with an epistemic notion (inconceivability) and then relates it by implication

to something ontological (existing "so truly") that can ground a judgment of relative greatness. The Modal Ontological Argument by contrast is ontological from the start, since it is concerned with ("metaphysical") possibility and necessity. As both Malcolm and Hartshorne stressed, noncontingency is to be taken as itself a "great-making" characteristic. We can, therefore, regard Anselm's transition from the epistemic to the ontological as being embodied in the translation of Anselm's talk about conceivability into modal language. Anselm's own "great-making" characteristic of existing so truly that nonexistence is inconceivable is then matched by the "perfection" of existing non-contingently. Omitting any explicit reference to the notion of something "truly" existing will, of course, prevent us from deducing anything corresponding to Anselm's conclusion that *G* exists so truly that it cannot be conceived not to exist. The most that we shall be able to deduce is something corresponding to what I have presented as Anselm's penultimate conclusion: that *G* cannot be conceived not to exist. This, however, will be conclusion enough for us, since, when this is translated into modal language, we get the proposition that *G* cannot possibly not exist.

Another obvious difference between the two arguments is, however, irreducible. It arises from the fact that Anselm's argument concerns *G,* whereas the standard Modal Ontological Argument concerns God, or a divine being, or a being characterized in such a way (e.g., as perfect) that we are meant to agree that any such being would be divine. This is a significant difference, even if it is allowed that being *G* and being God (or divine, perfect, etc.) are in some way equivalent. The difference is significant because being *G*—something than which a greater cannot be conceived—has conceptual content that is put to work in Anselm's argument in a way that is matched by nothing in the standard Modal Ontological Argument. It is put to work, specifically, in an argument concerning *relative greatness.* A reasonably faithful modal rendition of Anselm's argument is therefore going to be significantly different from the standard versions of the Modal Ontological Argument. Let us see what emerges.

What I have isolated as Anselm's sole explicit premise, (5), states that it is possible to conceive of something existing that cannot be conceived not to exist. The modal equivalent of this is that it is possible for there to be something that cannot possibly not exist: that is, that necessarily exists. Let this be our first premise. A modal version of one of the theses I have presented as background assumptions to Anselm's argument—namely, that anything that cannot be conceived not to exist is greater than anything

that can be conceived not to exist—is obviously going to be essential to any argument that attempts to retain significant features of Anselm's original argument. A first stab at a modal rendering might be to the effect that anything that cannot not exist (i.e., that necessarily exists) is greater than anything that can possibly not exist. This will not do, however, because Anselm's original assertion was not restricted to things that actually exist.[13] He was making a claim about anything that is so much as conceivable. Any *conceivable* thing that cannot be conceived not to exist is, Anselm is claiming, greater than any *conceivable* thing that can be conceived not to exist. Since, however, Anselm regards his claim as a necessary and a priori truth, we can necessitate the previous modal formulation: *necessarily,* anything that necessarily exists is greater than anything that does not necessarily exist. This by itself will to some extent solve the problem of the scope of Anselm's assertion.[14] It will not entirely solve it, however. This is because the resulting proposition means that, in any possible world, anything that cannot fail to exist is greater than anything *in that world* that is able not exist. Anselm means more than even this. He means (when "translated") that any possible necessary being is greater than *any possible* being that can possibly not exist. To make clear that this stronger reading is what is intended, we can, at least for the moment, express our second premise as follows: Necessarily, anything that necessarily exists is greater than any possible thing that can possibly not exist.[15]

Since Anselm's core notion of being such that nothing greater can be conceived is put to work in his argument, we need to bring it into our formulation. I shall represent it by a third premise that corresponds to Anselm's background assumption, for which he had argued in *Proslogion II,* that it is possible to conceive of something a greater than which cannot be conceived, and to conceive it as existing. Although Anselm does not explicitly advert to this assumption in his *Proslogion III* argument, he implicitly relies on it to secure his conclusion. This is because Anselm derives a contradiction from the assumption that *G* can be conceived not to exist, and then immediately infers from the falsity of this assumption that *G* cannot be conceived not to exist, and hence exists with maximal truth. If, however, the reason why *G* cannot be conceived not to exist is that *G* cannot be conceived *at all,* Anselm's conclusion would of course not follow.[16] In a modal presentation of the argument that is meant to be both fully explicit and valid we need to represent this background assumption by a premise. A first stab at formulating it might be as the premise that it is possible for there to be something such that nothing possible is greater than it. Let us,

for short, term such a possible being "maximally great."[17] Anselm intends something stronger than this, however. For someone might hold both that it is possible for there to exist something than which nothing possible is greater, and also hold that it is possible for this thing to exist and *not* be something than which no possible thing is greater. This supposed possibility—of something being contingently maximally great—is excluded by Anselm because of the way he treats *G* as an intentional object. Whenever Anselm makes reference to *G,* even within merely conceived-of and counterfactual contexts, it remains *G* (remains its intentional self, as it were). One clear illustration of this is the following: "For no one who denies or doubts that there is something than which a greater cannot be conceived denies or doubts that if it existed, it would not be able not to exist either in reality or for the mind. For otherwise it would not be something than which a greater cannot be conceived" (R 1). If we disregard this artefact of Anselm's handling of intentional objects, and simply ask whether Anselm would have held that any conceivable *G* is *essentially G,* the answer is clear and affirmative. Something than which a greater cannot be conceived, if such a thing existed, would be eternal; and eternity pertains to a thing's essential nature.[18] Moreover, eternity suffices for something to be *G.* This is made clear by the passage we considered above (R 8) in which Anselm ascends through grades of greatness to that than which a greater cannot be conceived. The distinction between this last and all the earlier elements in the comparison is the distinction between eternity (and all it entails) and temporality.[19] These views entail that any conceivable *G* is essentially *G:* or, in an exclusively modal idiom, that any possible maximally great being is essentially maximally great.

Moreover, a modal version of Anselm's argument will not reach its desired conclusion unless it includes some such reference to essential maximal greatness. From the fact that there is something in some "possible world" that is, in that world, such that there is nothing greater than it in any world, we shall, given the other premises of our argument, be able to deduce that this being actually exists and exists necessarily. We shall not, however, be able to deduce that this being as it actually exists is maximally great, if such a thing's greatness can vary from world to world. All we should have proved is the actual existence of some necessary being that is *possibly,* but perhaps not actually, maximally great. A straightforward way of avoiding this problem is to have as a premise of our argument the claim that there is a possible being that is *essentially* maximally great.[20] If we do this, however, we cannot compare *beings as such* in terms of their greatness. Given that

things can vary in greatness from "world" to "world," we need to compare objects-as-they-are-in-a-world, or the degrees of greatness that objects have at worlds.[21] The notion of a possible being that is essentially maximally great will then get expressed as the claim that there is a possible X such that nothing possible, in any world in which it exists, is greater than X is in any possible world in which X exists. Premise (2) then needs to be rephrased so that it, too, compares beings-in-worlds in terms of greatness. What results is the following as the premises of a modal rendering of Anselm's *Proslogion III* argument:

1. It is possible for there to be something that exists necessarily.
2. Necessarily, anything that necessarily exists is, in each possible world in which it exists, greater than is any possible thing that can possibly not exist: that is, it is greater than any such thing is in *any* world in which it exists.
3. It is possible for there to be something X such that nothing possible, in any possible world in which it exists, is greater than X is in any possible world in which X exists.[22]

These convoluted premises are modal renderings of claims that Anselm not only makes, but that are at work in the argument of *Proslogion III*. From them it is possible to prove that the kind of thing claimed to be possible in (3)—namely, the modal equivalent of Anselm's *G*—actually exists. Here is an informal proof.[23]

Premises (1) and (3) are about what is possible. So consider two possible worlds, A and B, in which these two possibilities are respectively realized. In A there is something Y that exists necessarily, and in B there is something X that is such that nothing possible is greater than it: that is, in no possible world is there something that is, in that world, greater than X is in B.[24] Given the latter, there is in particular nothing in A that is greater than X is in B. However, in A there is something (namely Y) that exists necessarily. Moreover, (2) tells us that necessarily, and hence in A, anything that exists necessarily is, in each world in which it exists, greater than anything in any possible world that can possibly not exist. Hence Y is (in A) greater than anything in any possible world that can possibly not exist. Now return to B and consider X. Suppose, for the sake of *reductio,* that X can possibly not exist. If so, then Y existing necessarily in possible world A is (in A) greater than X (in B), since X can possibly not exist, whereas Y exists necessarily. This contradicts our premise that no possible thing is greater that X. So X

must, in B, *necessarily exist* (in order not to be worsted by Y). Hence, X actually exists (since what necessarily exists exists in all possible worlds). Moreover, our third premise states that this X is such that nothing is possibly greater than it is in *any* world in which it exists. So this is true of it as it exists in the actual world. In other words, something than which nothing possible is greater actually exists.[25]

Have we found an independent, valid modal argument for the existence of a divine being—or, at least, of the modal equivalent of *G*—in *Proslogion III?* In fact, it is very dubious that we have, since it is very dubious that we have been correctly interpreting Anselm's original argument. We can begin our investigation of this matter by considering Gregory Schufreider's suggestion that when Anselm, as in the *Proslogion III* argument, raises the issue of whether something can be conceived not to exist, he always raises it in relation to actually existing things. "It is," Schufreider writes, "of the utmost importance to realize that when we speak of something that can be thought not to exist, we are speaking of something that exists" (Schufreider 1978: 32). According to Schufreider, Anselm's question is always whether, *given* that something exists, it can be conceived not to. If this is the case, the argument in *Proslogion III* cannot defensibly be construed, even implicitly, as an independent argument for the existence of *G,* since *G*'s existence would be presupposed by even raising the question of its conceivable nonexistence.

Schufreider has a strong case. First, there are the plain facts themselves. Peruse the pages of the *Proslogion,* and apart from the *Proslogion III* argument itself, the interpretation of which is now in question, you will never find Anselm raising the question of conceivable nonexistence except in relation to something that is regarded as existent. Moreover, the "Conditions" passages, where Anselm explicitly addresses the conditions under which something can be conceived not to exist, and which are therefore especially significant for the present issue, exhibit the same feature. Here is one representative example: "All and only those things can be conceived not to exist that have a beginning or an end or a conjunction of parts—and as I have said, whatever is not a whole everywhere and always" (R 4). It is, I think, pretty clear that in this passage Anselm is considering actual things that actually have a beginning or an end or parts. Schufreider also suggests that the fact that Anselm is restricting his attention to things that exist "is made sufficiently clear" in the *Reply* to Gaunilo when Anselm asserts that

"whatever exists, save that than which a greater cannot be thought, can be thought of as not existing *even when we know that it does exist*" (Schufreider 1978: 33, quoting *Reply IV* in the Charlesworth translation, with Schufreider's emphasis). This passage does lend some support to Schufreider's case, though he misconstrues the way in which it does. Schufreider takes it that it is the phrase he has italicized that lends the support, whereas in fact it does not. What this phrase indicates, rather, is that Anselm is dealing with a special case. Anselm is replying to Gaunilo's claim that we cannot conceive the nonexistence of what we *know* to exist. Anselm does so by insisting that we can conceive a thing to be nonexistent even when we know with certainty that it exists (*G* excepted, of course). The italicized phrase does not indicate Anselm's *general* approach to the matter of conceivable nonexistence. The other part of the sentence perhaps does, however: "*whatever exists,* save that than which a greater cannot be thought, can be thought of as not existing." Here Anselm does seem to be expressing his general attitude, before the special case in hand is dealt with in the final clause. Finally, there is a passage in the *Reply* that raises the issue of conceivable nonexistence in relation to a nonexistent, though in a way that confirms Schufreider's position: "But whatever can be conceived and does not exist would, *if it existed,* be able not to exist either in reality or for the mind" (R 1). As I argued in Chapter 2, being able not to exist "for the mind" is equivalent to being conceivably nonexistent. So Anselm is here raising the issue of conceivable nonexistence in relation to something that is regarded as nonexistent. Nevertheless, this is confirming evidence for Schufreider's thesis, since Anselm raises the issue of conceivable nonexistence only in relation to a possible situation in which the nonexistent does actually exist. We *would* be able to conceive the thing's nonexistence, Anselm states, *if* it existed.

There is, however, an apparently serious problem for Schufreider's view. There are two consecutive sentences in the *Reply* that are counter-examples to it. Here is the first: "What does not exist is able not to exist; and what is able not to exist can be conceived not to exist" (R 5). This clearly embodies the thesis that what does not exist can be conceived not to exist. This sentence, and the immediately following one that we shall consider shortly, are the *only* places in Anselm's writings where there is any suggestion that he is considering anything other than existents when he characterizes something as being conceivably nonexistent.[26] Still, they are there, and we need to account for them somehow. Even if Schufreider is correct to the extent that generally, indeed almost always, Anselm is concerned only

with actual existents when he raises the issue of conceivable nonexistence, these passages show that this is not invariably the case. The possibility therefore remains that *Proslogion III* is another exception to the general rule.

Part of Schufreider's case for his interpretation is that "in a sense the claim that something *can* be thought not to exist retains a significant force only if we are thinking about something that exists" (Schufreider 1978: 32). This is in my view rather too much of an "ordinary language" consideration to be relevant to Anselm. Moreover, Schufreider himself admits (in a footnote) that this assertion of his is "not true in a strictly logical sense, for if something does not exist it follows that it can be thought not to exist" (Schufreider 1978: 103 n27). One might attempt to account for the two consecutive sentences from the *Reply* that I have just alluded to by saying that this merely "logical sense" of conceivable nonexistence surfaces in them. This would not be plausible. According to Schufreider himself the logical point is "insignificant." So why did Anselm bother to make it—and make it, moreover, in the context of an argument for *G*'s existence? A variant of Schufreider's proposal may now suggest itself. It is not that Anselm is prepared to raise and answer the question whether something can be conceived not to exist only in relation to existent things, but, rather, only in relation to things whose ontic status is *settled*. The bulk of cases raise the issue in relation to things that are existent. The one counter-example so far considered raises it in relation to something nonexistent. We have yet to find a case where Anselm raises the issue in relation to something the reality of which is as yet undetermined. This would be significant. If Anselm's argument in *Proslogion III* is anything like my earlier characterization of it, Anselm raises and answers the question whether something can be conceived not to exist in a purely a priori context: not, that is to say, in relation to something already regarded as either existent or nonexistent. If Anselm never does this anywhere else, this, equally with Schufreider's own thesis, would raise a question about our current interpretation of the *Proslogion III* argument. In the one remaining counter-example to Schufreider's thesis, however, Anselm does precisely this. It is the sentence that immediately follows the one we have just considered: "Whatever can be conceived not to exist is not, *if it exists,* something than which a greater cannot be conceived. *And if it does not exist,* then, if it were to exist, it would not be something a greater than which cannot be conceived" (R 5). Here Anselm supposes that we can determine that something can be conceived not to exist *whether or not* it actually exists, and hence, presumably, simply on the basis

of a consideration of a thing's nature. This is just what our current interpretation of *Proslogion III* requires.

My own proposal for how to account for these two problematic sentences from the *Reply* is the polar opposite of the suggestion that they represent the surfacing of the legitimate but generally insignificant "logical" sense in which anything nonexistent can be conceived not to exist. I shall argue in the following chapter that in the *Reply* Anselm enunciates a substantive metaphysical thesis that is absent from the *Proslogion*. My suggestion is that our two recalcitrant sentences crucially depend upon this thesis.[27] What they express should not, therefore, be read back into any argument offered in the *Proslogion*.[28] It is not mere happenstance that Schufreider's claim is wholly true *as far as the* Proslogion *is concerned*.[29]

What, however, I regard as having the most weight in counting against our current construal of the *Proslogion III* argument is the fact that, according to it, Anselm helps himself to a premise, and expects his reader to accept as a premise—without any supporting argument, so presumably as something entirely self-evident—a claim that is extremely strong: namely, that we can conceive of something that cannot be conceived not to exist. This premise is so strong that it is, I believe, highly unlikely that Anselm would simply have asserted it, without support, at this crucial stage of his argument as if it were self-evident. Recall a statement of Anselm's that we have already briefly considered: "What does not exist is able not to exist; and what is able not to exist can be conceived not to exist" (R 5). This clearly implies that what does not exist can be conceived not to exist. Given this, how could Anselm sensibly have expected his target audience, the Fool, to accept wholly from scratch that something (anything) is such that it cannot be conceived not to exist? Anselm himself seems committed to accepting that the Fool would be wholly justified in rejecting Anselm's premise until actual existence is established *first*. For if something does not exist, then on Anselm's own admission it can be conceived not to exist—simply on the grounds of its nonexistence. The Fool is, of course, not presented as a total sceptic. He and everyone else party to the discussion accept that there are plenty of things that exist. Anselm, however, thinks it obvious that every common or garden, generally accepted existent can be conceived not to exist (e.g., R 1, 4). It is *only G* that Anselm could have expected the Fool to accept as something that is not conceivably nonexistent. We can, therefore, imagine the Fool, wondering whether to accept Anselm's premise, running through in his mind all the things the existence of which he accepts, and seeing that he can conceive the nonexistence of all of them:

and then turning his mind to *G*—but immediately refusing to admit that *G* cannot be conceived not to exist simply because he is unsure of its actual existence. So there is no reason for Anselm to have expected the Fool to accept that *anything* is such that its nonexistence cannot be conceived.[30]

This is somewhat speculative. I have made a suggestion about what we can reasonably suppose Anselm to have expected the Fool to accept as an unsupported, self-evident premise. Is there, however, any concrete indication that Anselm viewed the dialectical situation in the way I have suggested? In fact there is. There are two passages where Anselm *conditionalizes* his claims about conceivable nonexistence. The first reads as follows: "Something than which a greater cannot be conceived cannot, *if it exists,* be conceived not to exist" (R 1). There is nothing about the context in which this occurs to explain the italicized qualification. I can conclude nothing other than that Anselm felt that it would be unjustified to claim without qualification that *G* cannot be conceived not to exist, except on the basis that *G* does actually exist—or, at least, on the basis of further argument to this effect. The other passage from earlier in the same section of the *Reply* is perhaps even clearer on the point: "For no one who denies or doubts that there is something than which a greater cannot be conceived denies or doubts that *if it existed,* it would not be able not to exist either in reality or for the mind" (R 1). If *Proslogion III* offers a self-contained argument for the existence of *G,* even implicitly, it too must rely on no more than what no one would deny or doubt. This passage from the *Reply* surely makes it clear that Anselm thought that if this is the dialectical situation, he can rely on nothing stronger than a conditional claim: *G* cannot be conceived not to exist *if it exists.* The actual existence of *G* must be determined before its inconceivable nonexistence can be reasonably accepted.[31] In the *Proslogion III* argument it is not, of course, the impossibility of conceiving the nonexistence of specifically *G* that one is (supposedly) being asked to accept, but simply that there is *something* the nonexistence of which cannot be conceived. But that, as we have seen, is of no moment, since *G* is the only reasonable (indeed possible) candidate. If one has any doubt that *G*—such a conceivable thing, such an intentional object—cannot be conceived not to exist (on the grounds that it may not exist), one is hardly likely to accept that *anything* cannot be conceived not to exist.

I regard the above as strong evidence that Anselm would not—as our current interpretation supposes—have presented as self-evidently true the claim that we can conceive of something that cannot be conceived not to

exist. If, however, Anselm plainly states this as a premise of the *Proslogion III* argument, all this supposed evidence would be nugatory. And according to both ways of translating the opening of *Proslogion III* that we have so far considered, this seems to be just what Anselm does. According to one translation Anselm states, "For something can be conceived to exist that cannot be conceived not to exist." According to the other, "impersonal" reading Anselm states, "It is possible to conceive of something that cannot be conceived not to exist." There is no substantive difference between these two versions. Richard Campbell (1976: 91–6), however, has proposed a significantly different reading. According to Campbell's proposal we should take the subject of the sentence (specifically, the subject of the verb "can" or "is possible") to be that of the preceding sentence: "Which certainly so truly exists that it cannot be conceived not to exist." As we have seen, this initial sentence of *Proslogion III* itself carries on the reference of the last sentence of the preceding section in which Anselm re-asserts the main conclusion of *Proslogion II* that *G* actually exists: "Without doubt, therefore, something than which a greater cannot be conceived exists both in the intellect and in reality." Campbell's suggestion is, therefore, that the crucial sentence with which we are currently concerned also makes reference to *G*. So, the three sentences on Campbell's reading (though in my translation) run as follows: "Without doubt, therefore, something than which a greater cannot be conceived exists both in the intellect and in reality. Which [sc. *G*] certainly so truly exists that it cannot be conceived not to exist. For it [sc. *G*] can be conceived to be something that cannot be conceived not to exist." Linguistically there is nothing to be said against this construal of the Latin.[32] It shares with the impersonal reading the advantage over Charlesworth's translation, already noted, that its phrasing echoes that of *Proslogion II* in a way that it is plausible to suppose Anselm intended. A related advantage that is peculiar to it is that on Campbell's reading alone does Anselm's comparison of greatness in the second clause precisely parallel the comparison he had made in *Proslogion II*. As I have already mentioned, when in the preceding section Anselm compares existing in reality as well as in the mind with existing only in the mind, it is definitely the *same* "something" that is in question. X existing both ways is greater than X existing in the mind alone. Anselm does not think that *anything* that exists both ways is greater than *anything* that exists only in the mind. We have also seen, however, that the only way to make sense of the *Proslogion III* argument when it is not construed in accordance with Campbell's interpretation

is to see Anselm as relying on the background assumption that *whatever* cannot be conceived as not existing is greater than *anything* that can be so conceived. Now, it is certainly the case, as I have already pointed out, that Anselm accepts this principle; and it is put to work in Anselm's argument. Nevertheless, if, as I have been suggesting, Anselm intended the *Proslogion III* argument to echo moves he made in the *Proslogion II,* Campbell's reading wins out as alone significantly echoing the earlier passage. In *Proslogion II* Anselm states that it is greater for something to exist both in the mind and in reality than for it to exist merely in the mind. On Campbell's reading alone is Anselm making the following parallel step in *Proslogion III:* that it is greater for something both to exist in reality and to be not conceivably nonexistent than for it merely to exist in reality.

A final reason to favour Campbell's reading is that it so nicely fits all the evidence I have marshalled against the suggestion that Anselm would have presented without any justification whatsoever so bold a claim as that we can conceive of something that cannot be conceived not to exist—when, that is, the question of whether the thing in question *actually* exists has not been settled. I should say, however, that this evidence does not demand that Campbell's reading of the first sentence of *Proslogion III* be accepted as the correct one. In other words, if, for whatever reason, one rejected Campbell's reading, this would not count against the case I have constructed to show that there is no Modal Ontological Argument in *Proslogion III.* The crucial issue is whether in *Proslogion III* Anselm presents the claim that it is possible to conceive of something that cannot be conceived not to exist otherwise than on the basis of *G*'s actual existence. It is precisely this, I have suggested, that the evidence rules out; and it is this that Campbell's reading nicely excludes. Nevertheless, it remains the case that immediately prior to *Proslogion III* the existence of *G* has indeed been demonstrated in *Proslogion II.* Perhaps this is enough to explain why now Anselm can expect assent to the proposition that something can be conceived that cannot be conceived not to exist. An objection I made earlier against the first way of construing Charlesworth's translation would then apply: for now Anselm is being strangely reticent. Why does Anselm propose merely that it is possible to conceive of *something* that cannot be conceived not to exist, if the only reason for accepting any such possibility is that *G* exists? To my mind this would constitute a minor imperfection in the way Anselm lays out his argument in *Proslogion III;* and it is in part for this reason that I favour Campbell's translation. A minor imperfection, however, is all it would be. It

would certainly not be enough to overthrow the evidence of the present chapter.

I conclude, therefore, that there is no independent argument for the existence of *G,* modal or otherwise, in *Proslogion III,* however implicit. The whole argument builds upon and presupposes the findings of *Proslogion II.* If there is indeed an argument for *G*'s existence independent of *Proslogion II,* modal or otherwise, in Anselm's writings, it lies elsewhere.

5

ARGUMENTS IN THE *REPLY TO GAUNILO*

Although attempts to find a Modal Ontological Argument in Anselm's writings have concentrated primarily on the passage from *Proslogion III* that we considered in the previous chapter, both Hartshorne and Malcolm claimed that such an argument can also be found in Anselm's *Reply* to Gaunilo.[1] One especially promising passage occurs in the first section of this work. I have quoted parts of it in the previous chapter. Here it is in its entirety:

> For no one who denies or doubts that there is something than which a greater cannot be conceived denies or doubts that if it existed, it would not be able not to exist either in reality or for the mind. For otherwise it would indeed not be something than which a greater cannot be conceived. But whatever can be conceived and does not exist would, if it existed, be able not to exist either in reality or for the mind. So, if it can just be conceived, something than which a greater cannot be conceived cannot not exist.[2]

I have already argued that Anselm's notion of something being able not to exist "for the mind" is equivalent to that of the thing's nonexistence being conceivable; so let us make that substitution. Also, because modal interpreters of Anselm focus on his employment of the notion of conceivability, and in order to keep things simple, let us at least initially ignore Anselm's invocation of the notion of possibly not existing "in reality," and just attend to what he says about conceivability. If we then replace claims about what no one would doubt with straightforward assertions; if we excise the merely explanatory "for otherwise it would indeed not be something than which a greater cannot be conceived"; and if, finally, we interpret, as I think we should, the final "cannot" as expressing the necessity with which a con-

clusion follows from the premises of a valid argument: then, employing my abbreviation *"G,"* the following argument results:

> If *G* existed, it could not be conceived not to exist. But whatever can be conceived and does not exist could, if it existed, be conceived not to exist. So, necessarily, if *G* can be conceived, *G* exists.

If we make the usual translation from conceivability to possibility, we then get the following:

> If *G* existed, it would not be possible for it not to exist. But whatever is possible and does not exist could, if it existed, possibly not exist. So, necessarily, if *G* is possible, *G* exists.

This may seem strikingly similar to standard presentations of the Modal Ontological Argument. Here, at last, we have an explicitly conditional premise: If *G* existed, it would not be possible for it not to exist. Moreover, since this is clearly being presented as a necessary truth, we seem to have a version of what Hartshorne dubbed "Anselm's Principle." Furthermore, the argument, unlike that of *Proslogion III,* is explicitly presented as one for the conclusion that *G* exists. It is true that Anselm's argument, unlike the Modal Ontological Argument, involves counterfactual claims. But since Anselm thinks that they are necessary truths, we may simply treat them as necessitated material conditionals. In other words, when Anselm says (as modally interpreted) that if *G* were to exist, it would not be possible for it not to exist, we can take this as the claim that it is necessary that if anything is *G,* it is not possible for it not to exist. Before I present a final modal rendering of Anselm's argument, however, we need, in the present-day context, to "tame" Anselm's apparent reference to nonexistents in "whatever does not exist" in his second premise.[3] There are various ways of doing this; but we remain closest to the spirit of Anselm if we construe his statement in terms of possible instantiations of essential kinds of thing. An essential kind is a kind such that if anything (possible) is a member of that kind, that thing cannot possibly exist without being a member of that kind.[4] It does not misrepresent Anselm's thought, I believe, if we interpret his second premise as being to the effect that for any essential kind that can possibly be instantiated, if there is actually no instantiation of it, any possible instance of it could possibly not exist.[5] One final thing needs to be added to Anselm's argument. When Anselm writes that "whatever can be conceived and does

not exist would, if it existed, be able not to exist either in reality or for the mind," he is clearly implying that *G* can itself be conceived. His argument, even in its original form, would not hold together unless this were so. We need to make this explicit in our modal formulation as the claim that it is possible that *G* should exist. When we do all of this, the following emerges:

1. It is possible that there should be something of essential kind *G*.
2. Necessarily, if anything of kind *G* exists, it exists necessarily.
3. For any essential kind K, if nothing is K, then, necessarily, anything K can possibly not exist.

From these premises we can validly deduce that *G* exists. The first premise tells us that there is some possible world in which something is *G*. Let us call it "X," and let the world in question be *A*.[6] Since X is *G* in *A,* we can conclude, by the second premise, that X cannot possibly not exist (with respect to *A*). We can conclude this, because the second premise tells us this about anything that is *G* in *any* possible world. But if X cannot possibly not exist with respect to some possible world, then X actually exists, and exists necessarily.[7]

It looks as if we have found a logically valid Modal Ontological Argument that is implicit in Anselm's work. We arrive at the argument simply by taking Anselm's notion of conceivability to imply possibility, and by reconstruing Anselm's original counterfactual language in a surely not unreasonable way. Moreover, the argument I have constructed bears a striking resemblance to the standard version of the Modal Ontological Argument. Both arguments in effect share the first two premises. Attentive readers will have noticed, however, that in the above demonstration no use was made of premise (3). This premise is otiose! Anselm most certainly did not think that what corresponds to this premise in his own original argument was superfluous. That "whatever can be conceived and does not exist would, if it existed, be able not to exist either in reality or for the mind" manifestly plays an essential part in his argument. As Robert Merrihew Adams (1971a: 42) has pointed out, however, this premise, when modally interpreted, bears a striking resemblance to the so-called *Brouwerian axiom* that is the characteristic axiom of the B system of modal logic.[8] It is an absolutely basic modal truth that if something is actual, it is possible. The Brouwerian axiom goes further, stating that if something is actual, it is *necessary* that it is possible: it is possible with respect to all (accessible) possible worlds. The proposition that if something is *not* the case, then it is necessarily possible

that it not be the case is but a substitution instance of this. Anselm's own assertion when modally interpreted—if something (or something of a certain kind) does not exist, then, if it *were* to exist, it (or any possible instance of that kind) could possibly not exist—similarly seems to be saying of anything that fails actually to exist that in *any possible circumstance* in which it did exist, it would be possible for it not to exist. So, it may be suggested, Anselm's assertion, when modally interpreted, is a reflection of the Brouwerian axiom.[9] The idea is, therefore, that when Anselm's argument is modally "translated," the part of it that goes beyond the two premises in the standard version of the Modal Ontological Argument is simply a way of ushering in a certain somewhat sophisticated piece of modal reasoning. After all, Anselm hardly thought about matters in terms of systems of modal logic. He had a firm grasp of a number of fairly basic modal inferences; but he also had, it may be suggested, a number of modal convictions or intuitions. When what is required is something that today would be represented by a rather sophisticated train of modal reasoning, the best that Anselm could do was to reach the desired conclusion by asserting a rich modal premise, which could then interact with other premises in a relatively elementary way.

In fact, however, Anselm's reasoning in the argument in question is wholly unrelated to the Brouwerian axiom. Indeed, Anselm's reasoning throughout the *Reply* (as elsewhere) is not any form of modal reasoning as this is nowadays understood. My reason for claiming this is that what is in play in the "modal" arguments in the *Reply* is, not unsurprisingly, Anselm's own general understanding of possibility and necessity on the one hand, and of conceivability on the other—topics that we investigated in Chapters 2 and 3. What we saw there was just how far removed Anselm's ideas on these matters are from those enshrined in contemporary modal logic and the philosophy that is informed by it. The refutation of the suggestion that Anselm's *Reply* contains a Modal Ontological Argument consists of little more than an exposition of this fact. Since those who interpret Anselm as having propounded, at least implicitly, a Modal Ontological Argument fasten on some of Anselm's claims about what is and is not conceivable, let us briefly remind ourselves of Anselm's understanding of conceivability.

Recall the very first time Anselm invokes the notion of something's nonexistence being inconceivable. It is at the beginning of *Proslogion III,* where, as I explained in the previous chapter, Anselm implicitly claims that *G* cannot be conceived not to exist because and only because it exists with a maximal degree of "truth." Such inconceivability is an epistemic registration of a certain manner of existing. Being not conceivably nonexistent is

not an "attribute" of *G* (or of God); it is not, in itself, a "great-making" characteristic. It is, rather, a cognitive index or reflection of the greatness of *G*, which is itself to be understood in ontological terms. That is why we find Anselm writing that if *G* could, *per impossibile,* be conceived not to exist, it would have to exist *differently* from the way in which it must if it is to be *G* at all (R 5). The supreme mode of existing that is in question here is possible for, and only for, a being that has (or is) a certain supreme nature: a nature that Anselm characterizes in the several passages where he lists the Conditions that must attach to something if its nonexistence is to be inconceivable. In a nutshell, a thing cannot be conceived not to exist if and only if it is utterly *simple* (and, of course, is conceived as such). It does not even have temporal parts, since it is not in time at all, but is "eternal." For such a being to exist is for it to exist *as a whole* at every place and every time (R 4). This is the kind of being that alone cannot be conceived not to exist. To ignore this ontological dimension to Anselm's claims about conceivability would be seriously to misrepresent the fundamental character of his philosophy. The distance of this perspective from that of modal logic hardly needs further comment.

We can, I believe, come by a proper appreciation of what is going on in the argument from the first section of the *Reply* with which we are presently concerned, if we first look again at a passage further on in the *Reply* that we considered in the last chapter: "What does not exist is able not to exist; and what is able not to exist can be conceived not to exist" (R 5). When modern readers come across this sentence, they are likely to presume that Anselm is propounding one of the most basic truths in modal logic: that if something is actually so, it is possibly so. Anselm, it may be thought, is simply considering a negative instance of this. The modern reader is likely to assume this because of the first half of the sentence: what does not exist is able not to exist. As we saw in Chapter 3, however, when Anselm writes, as here, about what a thing "can" or "is able" to do or be, he does not have logical possibility in mind. As we saw, Anselm regards a statement that a nonexistent thing is "able not to exist" as doubly improper (though true). It treats an incapacity as if it were a capacity; and it attributes it to something that does not exist, and so can possess no such thing. To say that a thing that does not exist is able not to exist is true, according to Anselm, because and only because there is something that actually exists that has a power over the thing's existence. This in turn implies something about the thing's nature. It must be such that something else can indeed have such a power over it: just as, to recur to an example of Anselm's cited in Chapter 3, Hec-

tor must have one nature, and Achilles a different one, in order for the former to be "able" to be vanquished by the latter. All of this manifestly involves a notion of possibility quite different from the modern logical one. So, to return to the sentence in hand, the notion of logical possibility emerges in it, if it does at all, only (and implicitly) in the second half of the sentence, with the invocation of conceivability. The sentence is to be interpreted somewhat as follows: What does not exist is able not to exist (in some non-logical sense that concerns natural necessity and possibility); and what is able not to exist (in this sense) can be conceived not to exist (and so it is logically possible that it should not exist). This clearly entails an instance of the basic modal truth mentioned above: If P, then possibly P. So there is still a case, it may be thought, for supposing that Anselm is enunciating this modal principle here, albeit by implication. In the previous chapter I claimed that Anselm is not making or relying on such an elementary logical point in this passage, but that what he is asserting here relies on a strong and controversial metaphysical thesis. It is now time to substantiate that claim.

The thesis "If P, then possibly P" is about as self-evident a thesis as one gets in modal logic. If you were to express a doubt about the (necessary) truth of the principle, you will probably be told that you perhaps have not grasped how "possible" is understood by modal logicians, and that you may well be equating "possible" and "merely possible." In modal logic, and, indeed, in modern analytical philosophy generally, to say that something is possible in no way implies that it is also possible that it not be so. To say that something is possible is to say that it is *at least* possible. It may also be actual. Indeed, it may even be necessary. A good reason for endorsing this way of looking at things is that if one denies that what is actual (or necessary) is possible, one is saying that it is not possible: that is, that it is impossible. But, clearly, nothing that is actually (or necessarily) the case can be impossible. It is for this reason that the principle "If P, then possibly P" has come to seem a self-evident *logical truth*.[10] In order to discern this thesis in what Anselm wrote—"What does not exist is able not to exist; and what is able not to exist can be conceived not to exist"—we have, however, to infer it, even when Anselm's sentence is modally interpreted. The inference is, indeed, a basic one. It is nothing more than Hypothetical Syllogism. Still, if what Anselm had in mind is so self-evidently true, we may wonder why he did not just state it. In particular, why does Anselm insert a reference to possibility in some non-logical sense in the middle of his sentence? Could it be that he regarded the inference from actual nonexistence to conceivable

nonexistence as less self-evident than the inference from an "ability" not to exist to conceivable nonexistence? Or did he, at least, think that nonexistence is less of an immediate ground for such conceivability than an "ability" not to exist? I suggest that this is indeed so.

According to the modal interpretation of Anselm, which I have defended in Chapter 2, conceivability implies logical possibility. As I have stressed before, however, no one can sensibly suggest that the two notions are simply identical. Conceivability has an epistemic dimension that logical possibility lacks. So, the immediate ground of our ability to conceive something, the reason why we can do it, must itself be at least in part epistemic. In particular, the sheer, objective nonexistence of a thing in no way explains our ability to conceive it as nonexistent. At the very least, we must be able to conceive the thing. We can hardly conceive the nonexistence of something, if we do not even conceive it. Anselm occasionally omits to specify this condition, as in the sentence now under consideration. This sometimes also happens in the Conditions passages, as in the following: "What does not exist here, but somewhere else, can be conceived to exist nowhere, just as it does here" (R 1). Anselm can hardly be suggesting, however, that the sheer fact that something does not exist here—a fact that may be wholly unknown to us, involving an object with which we may be wholly unacquainted—suffices for an ability to conceive the thing as nonexistent. That would be unintelligible. With this particular example, the context makes it clear that Anselm is not suggesting anything so bizarre, but that the thing in question is recognized as not existing here. This is indicated by the preceding sentence in the text, in which Anselm makes a parallel point about time: "For what did not exist yesterday and today does exist can be supposed never to exist, just as it *is understood* not to have existed yesterday." So, Anselm is not suggesting that if a thing does not exist, it can be conceived not to exist. At the very least he is saying that a thing that does not exist, *and that can be (or, perhaps, is) conceived,* can be conceived not to exist. I take it that Anselm does not explicitly advert to this in this passage (and in one or two others) because he takes it as obvious that this is what is to be understood. And no doubt it is. Less obvious, however, is how much more needs to be added to make Anselm's assertion plausible. It is, for instance, not sufficient to explain our ability to conceive a thing's nonexistence to say that the thing does not exist and that we are conceiving it. Suppose that I am thinking of a friend of mine, and that, unbeknownst to me, he has recently died. The fact that he actually does not exist is irrelevant to my ability to conceive his nonexistence. Since the fact is wholly

unknown to me, it can in no way explain my ability to conceive one thing rather than another. On the other hand, it would be absurd to suppose that what is required is that I both think of my friend and think of him as nonexistent—for that itself constitutes the very conceiving as nonexistent that is in question. What this indicates is that there is something more about our conception of an object that must be brought into the picture if we are to make our ability to conceive the nonexistence of the object intelligible. The more that needs to be brought in is, of course, the object's *nature*. Anselm's Conditions passages make this plain. Even plainer, perhaps, is the demonstration of this fact offered by the passage where Anselm ascends through the various degrees of greatness to that than which a greater cannot be conceived, and *hence* to that which cannot be conceived not to exist. The crucial final move, at least, is a move from one nature to another, since it is a move from what is temporal to what is eternal (R 8).[11]

We can now see that the connection between nonexistence and conceivable nonexistence is far from immediate for Anselm. It is mediated by the nonexistent thing's nature (and—something too obvious always to mention—by our conception of that nature). It is precisely this mediation that the first clause of Anselm's sentence we have been mulling over makes explicit: what does not exist is able not to exist. Such an "ability," as we know from Chapter 3, necessarily goes together with possession of a certain nature. Something "can" not exist only if it is such that something else has a genuine ability and power over it. It is on the basis of such a (conceived-of) nature, one necessarily implied by a thing's nonexistence, that Anselm then asserts, in the second half of our sentence, that any such thing can be *conceived* as nonexistent. The only kind of thing over whose existence nothing could have any power is an absolutely simple and eternal thing. Anything else—any conceivable other thing—through meeting at least one of Anselm's Conditions, can be conceived not to exist. The first half of Anselm's sentence—in this respect like the modal principle "If P, then possibly P"—makes an inference from a sheer fact of nonexistence. If something does not exist, Anselm is claiming, then "it" has (or is) a nature of a certain sort. This has nothing to do with what we can conceive. It is, for Anselm, a basic metaphysical truth. Only after this move has been made are issues of conceivability appropriate. Anselm then states that anything that has such a nature, and is conceived as having such a nature, can be conceived not to exist—and, hence, on the modal interpretation, its nonexistence is logically possible. This is in total contrast to the status of the principle "If (not-) P, then possibly (not-) P" in modal logic

and the modern philosophy that it informs. Here the inference is immediate and self-evident.

What, however, of the argument in *Reply I* that is our real concern? The suggestion we are considering is that this argument (when modally interpreted) turns not on the principle "If P, then possibly P," but on the Brouwerian axiom: "If P, then necessarily possibly P." From the perspective of modal logic this is a significantly stronger principle. So how are our preceding ruminations concerning the former principle relevant, even if sound? Their relevance can be seen in a number of ways. First, and most simply: if, as we have just seen is the case, Anselm did not think along the lines of modal logic even when it concerns such a basic principle as "If P, then possibly P," then it is highly unlikely that he did so when more advanced levels of modal logic, as represented by the Brouwerian axiom, are concerned. Secondly, the reason why Anselm does not think along the lines of modal logic when it concerns the principle "If P, then possibly P" is that the inference from actuality to (logical) possibility is not immediate for Anselm, but is mediated by an inference involving a thing's nature; whereas from the perspective of modal logic the inference is immediate. So, for example, the sheer nonexistence of something in and of itself entails that the thing's nonexistence is possible. Similarly, in relation to the Brouwerian axiom, from very weak assumptions indeed one can immediately infer from the sheer nonexistence of a thing that in each possible situation in which it exists, it is possible for it not to exist.[12]

A third way of seeing that Anselm fails to reason in accordance with the Brouwerian axiom is a little more complex. It centres on the fact that the principle enunciated by Anselm that is supposed to give expression to the Brouwerian axiom—"whatever can be conceived and does not exist would, if it existed, be able not to exist either in reality or for the mind"—is minimally different from, indeed virtually contained in, his assertions that might be taken to express the much weaker modal claim "If P, then possibly P." The latter, it will be recalled, are assertions such as "Whatever does not exist . . . can be conceived not to exist." But the former—because, as we have seen, being able not to exist "for the mind" is equivalent, for Anselm, to being able to be conceived not to exist—implies the following: "Whatever can be conceived and does not exist could, if it existed, be conceived not to exist." We have also seen that Anselm often drops the (strictly necessary) qualification that the things that can be conceived not to exist can be conceived. (He does so in one of the assertions just cited.) So, when we make good this lack, we end up with the two following assertions to compare:

(A) "Whatever can be conceived and does not exist could, if it existed, be conceived not to exist."
(B) "Whatever can be conceived and does not exist . . . can be conceived not to exist."

The only difference between these two is that what the second claims to be actually conceivable is extended by the first to all the counterfactual situations in which the nonexistent thing in question exists. For Anselm, however, this "extension" is implicit in the apparently weaker claim. What, after all, for Anselm, is the ground of the ability to conceive a thing's nonexistence? It is the thing's nature. If it is utterly simple and (hence) eternal, it cannot be so conceived; otherwise, it can. But a thing does not change from being simple to being composite, or conversely, in virtue of existing. Or, to put the matter somewhat less problematically: conceivable nonexistence is a matter of a thing's (fundamental) nature, or essence, which overarches the existence/nonexistence issue. This fact is reflected in an absolutely fundamental principle of Anselm's: namely, that we hold a thing's nature constant when we consider it as existent or nonexistent. This is implied in his treating the objects whose existence is in question as intentional objects. From this perspective, changing the nature would be changing the object. This is, indeed, in evidence in the very passage from the *Reply* that we are now considering, since it begins: "For no one who denies or doubts that there is something than which a greater cannot be conceived denies or doubts that if it existed, it would not be able not to exist either in reality or for the mind. For otherwise it would indeed not be something than which a greater cannot be conceived." If *G* does not actually exist, and so is a merely intentional object, it would, Anselm is saying, be absurd to suggest that if "it" actually existed, "it" would not be *G*. The principle is also in evidence in the argument in *Proslogion II,* where it is clear that Anselm is supposing that when something is merely conceived, and so is "in the mind," and is then conceived as existing in reality as well, it is *the same thing* that is conceived on the two occasions. Actual existence in no way changes, or adds to, a thing's nature. Existence is simply the realization of a *given* nature. Otherwise, the identity of the intentional object would be lost. To put the matter another way: the natures that Anselm has in mind when he refers to nonexistents possibly existing are *essential natures*.[13]

With these facts in mind, let us return to a comparison of theses (A) and (B) above. First, consider something, X, that does not exist. This will have a certain nature: it will be of some essential kind—in the sense that,

necessarily, if it were to exist, it would be of such a kind.[14] According to thesis (B), we can conceive this thing's nonexistence. Anselm's reason for holding this is that X has a relevant nature: one implied by the fact that it "is able" not to exist. Thesis (A) simply considers the possible situation in which X actually exists, and claims that in this situation, too, X can be conceived not to exist. The ground for this is *exactly the same* as it was for (B): namely, X's nature. (A), in other words, is sustained by precisely the same Anselmian account of abilities and of conceivability that sustains (B). In that sense (A) is for Anselm no stronger a claim than (B). This, of course, is in striking contrast to the two principles of modal logic that are supposedly expressed by Anselm's language: the anodyne "If P, then possibly P" and the stronger Brouwerian axiom "If P, then *necessarily* possibly P." This fact—that two principles that in the context of modal logical are so significantly different should supposedly be expressed by two assertions that Anselm would have regarded as effectively equivalent—demonstrates that Anselm's assertions are not giving voice to inferences that are enshrined in modal logic.

Here is a fourth and final way of seeing that Anselm is not relying, even implicitly, on the Brouwerian axiom in his argument in *Reply I.* Recall that the part of the argument that is supposed to reflect the Brouwerian axiom is the following: "But whatever can be conceived and does not exist would, if it existed, be able not to exist either in reality or for the mind." Here I have reinstated Anselm's reference to being able not to exist "in reality": an element in the crucial sentence that detectors of Modal Ontological Arguments in Anselm tend to skip over. But presumably Anselm regarded it as an integral part of his train of thought. What the reference to being able to exist "in reality" expresses and relies on is, of course, Anselm's distinctive account of a thing's "ability" not to exist in terms of the power of another entity to prevent its existence. The reference to an ability not to exist "for the mind" expresses and relies on Anselm's view that only composite and temporal beings can be conceived not to exist. But is modal logic as such—even modal logic as strong as B, S4, or S5—committed to the view that if something does not exist, then something else *does* exist: something that has a power over the former? Or that a simple, timeless being cannot not exist? Well, Anselm does believe these things. These apparently bizarre views cannot just be excised from Anselm's arguments so as to produce something assessable within modal logic. If we do such a thing, the result will be that it is not Anselm we are considering. In the following chapter

we shall see how the passage we have been investigating, given that it is not to be viewed as expressing a Modal Ontological Argument, is to be interpreted properly.

Before moving on, however, I should say that the argument from *Reply I* we have been considering is but part of a unified longer passage. After having concluded that *G* actually exists if it can be conceived, Anselm continues as follows:

> But let us postulate that it [*sc*. *G*] does not exist, even though it can be conceived. Now, whatever can be conceived and does not exist would not, if it existed, be something than which a greater cannot be conceived. Therefore, if something than which a greater cannot be conceived existed, it would not be something than which a greater cannot be conceived—which is totally absurd. So it is false that something than which a greater cannot be conceived does not exist, if it can be so much as conceived. (R 1)[15]

This continuation is somewhat puzzling, at least to me. Anselm has, to his own satisfaction at least, just provided a sound argument for the existence of *G*. So why does he then suppose that this conclusion is false, and launch upon another stretch of argument? I can only think that Anselm was so taken by the *reductio ad absurdum* mode of arguing, as a way of showing with complete clarity the absolute necessity of a conclusion given certain premises, that he has recourse to it even when it is strictly unnecessary. Be this as it may, this final stretch of argument depends upon the argument of which it is the continuation, and must be interpreted accordingly. In particular, Anselm infers that if something that can be conceived does not exist, it would not be *G* if it existed, precisely because he has just argued that any such thing, if it existed, would be able not to exist either actually or for the mind. Anselm then immediately derives his contradiction on the assumption that *G* does not exist. Brian Leftow (2002) has devoted careful attention to this continuation passage, and dubs it "Anselm's neglected argument." He quite rightly sees that it is not an expression of the Modal Ontological Argument. He treats it, however, as an independent argument for the existence of *G*. As we have just seen, it is not. It is dependent on the argument of which it is a continuation; indeed, it is but a (somewhat otiose) reformulation of that very argument. Because he treats the argument as self-contained, Leftow has to come up with arguments in support of the

"premises" that Anselm supposedly employs. Leftow's arguments are certainly worth looking at; but they bear little relation to what is actually going on in this passage in Anselm.

There are two and only two other passages in the *Reply* that are candidates for being at least implicit versions of the Modal Ontological Argument. One is to be found in *Reply V.* We have already been much concerned with a sentence from this part of the *Reply.* It is a sentence that is in fact the beginning of a self-contained argument for the existence of *G,* which runs as follows:

> For what does not exist is able not to exist; and what is able not to exist can be conceived not to exist. But whatever can be conceived not to exist is not, if it exists, something than which a greater cannot be conceived. And if it does not exist, then, if it were to exist, it would not be something than which a greater than which cannot be conceived. But it cannot be said that something than which a greater cannot be conceived is not, if it exists, something than which a greater cannot be conceived; nor that, if it were to exist, it would not be something than which a greater cannot be conceived. (R 5)

I shall not bother to translate this passage into a modal idiom and assess its validity, since everything I have said about the argument in *Reply I* essentially applies to it. The same *non-logical principles* are at work in both arguments.

There is, however, one remaining passage in the *Reply* that may be thought to resist such an explanation—and, indeed, to conflict with the interpretation that I have been developing throughout this chapter. It reads as follows:

> For it is clear that it is similarly possible to conceive and understand what is unable not to exist. Whoever conceives this conceives something greater than one who conceives what is able not to exist. So, when something than which a greater cannot be conceived is conceived, if what is able not to exist is conceived, something than which a greater cannot be conceived is not being conceived. (R 9)

At first sight it may seem that this passage is easily accommodated by the interpretation I have been advocating. Anselm is employing his causal

sense of being "unable" not to exist. Since it is only Anselm's notion of conceivability, rather than "ability," that (implicitly) involves logical possibility, we can dismiss the present argument, since it does not even attain to the "modal" level at all. The problem, however, is that Anselm immediately goes on to conclude that *G* does indeed exist. He states that if anyone conceives *G* "it is necessary that what he conceives exists, since whatever is able not to exist is not what he is conceiving." It is clear, I think, that when Anselm says that "it is necessary that what he conceives exists," he is not merely saying that an inability not to exist (in his special sense) must be ascribed to (the intentional object) *G,* but that it necessarily follows from what has just been argued that *G* actually exists. So, the inference from "is not able not to exist" to "exists" is presented as being immediate. Could it be, after all, that Anselm's notion of not being "able" not to exist is that of logical impossibility? That would certainly make sense of the immediacy of the inference.

Given all the evidence I have marshalled, this is, I think, unlikely in the extreme. But if so, what is going on in *Reply IX?* Fortunately, an explanation is at hand. In this penultimate section of the *Reply* Anselm is reformulating his whole argument for *G*'s existence so as to accommodate an objection that Gaunilo had made to the claim that *G* exists even in the mind. We cannot even *conceive* it—at least, not the thing itself. When Anselm states in *Proslogion II* that *G* at least exists in the mind, all that can properly be meant, Gaunilo insists, is that one understands what is said when someone says "something than which a greater cannot be conceived." This falls short of understanding or knowing the thing itself that is denoted by these words: their *significatio.* According to Gaunilo, I cannot conceive anything, even a nature, that *is* something than which a greater cannot be conceived (PI 1, 4). In *Reply VIII* Anselm had argued against this. We can, he asserts, reach a conception of *(conicere) G* by ascending in thought through ever-higher levels of greatness. We can, for example, conceive of something that has neither beginning nor end, and this is better than something that has a beginning but no end. Finally we can attain to a conception of something that is not temporal, has no beginning or end, and lacks nothing. To conceive this is to conceive *that than which nothing greater can be conceived.* In *Reply IX,* however, Anselm claims that his case for the existence of *G* goes through even if what Gaunilo has claimed is true. He then offers the argument now under consideration. In other words, in one short passage Anselm is indicating how his whole case can be presented so as to accommodate Gaunilo's point. It would be hardly surprising, therefore, if Anselm cut corners somewhat. Gaunilo has already been given Anselm's arguments in *Reply I* and *V.* So Anselm now needs no more than a summary sketch. It is,

moreover, not difficult to see how Anselm could fill it out. When we conceive of *G,* Anselm claims, we are conceiving something that is unable not to exist. If this is not to be grossly question-begging in the context of an argument for the existence of *G,* what he means is not that *G actually* is such that it is unable not to exist, but that being unable not to exist pertains to *G qua* intentional object, or to *G*'s nature. But, as we know from the sentence in *Reply V* to which we have paid so much attention, whatever does not exist is able not to exist (in precisely the foregoing sense). So *G* exists.

One thing that is striking about this argument in *Reply IX* is that it, unlike all the other arguments for the existence of *G* that we have considered, entirely omits any reference to not being conceivably nonexistent. There is, I think, only one explanation of this fact. It is that Anselm is accommodating himself to Gaunilo's contention that, as Anselm himself puts it, although we can conceive something than which a greater cannot be conceived *(quo maius cogitari nequit),* we cannot conceive *that which is* something than which a greater cannot be conceived *(illud quo maius nequit cogitari).*[16] This strongly suggests that whenever Anselm has made the claim (not only in the *Reply,* but also in the *Proslogion*) that *G* cannot be conceived not to exist, he is not basing it on the abstract concept of *something than which* no greater can be conceived. He is basing it, rather, on our understanding of a certain nature that is *that which is* something than which a greater cannot be conceived. The nature in question, of course, is a wholly simple, atemporal nature. It is specifically *this* that cannot be conceived not to exist. In the argument in *Reply IX* Anselm is supposing, with Gaunilo, that we have no conception of any such nature. Since there is no "it" that cannot *itself* be conceived not to exist, he omits all reference to such conception.[17] But if such conception disappears, so does any implied "logical possibility." I have argued that Anselm's other arguments are grounded on metaphysical claims. This last one, in *Reply IX,* is a *purely* metaphysical argument. Its sole and sufficient justification is that whatever does not exist "is able" not to exist; and this, as we have seen, is a metaphysical claim. So, the argument of *Reply IX* does not, I suggest, undercut and make redundant the complex, largely metaphysical, arguments earlier in the *Reply,* but presupposes them. If this is right, there is no Modal Argument anywhere in the *Reply.*

Although the *Reply* contains no modal argument for the existence of *G,* even implicitly, what Anselm offers us in the *Reply* is strikingly new when

compared with the *Proslogion.* He manifestly offers us arguments for the existence of *G* that are, and are presented as being, independent of *Proslogion II.* We can pinpoint the new theses that make this possible. They are the two occasions on which Anselm tells us what must hold of *whatever does not exist.* If such does not hold of *G, G* exists. The first occasion is where Anselm states that "whatever can be conceived and does not exist would, if it existed, be able not to exist either in reality or for the mind" (R 1). The other is where Anselm states that "what does not exist is able not to exist; and what is able not to exist can be conceived not to exist" (R 5). Nothing like this was explicitly stated in the *Proslogion.* Once these claims are on the table, however, it is relatively straightforward, given Anselm's metaphysical convictions, to argue that *G* actually exists.

Perhaps the most illuminating way to compare and contrast the *Reply* and the *Proslogion* is to see how, from the perspective of the *Reply,* we can answer what I proposed in the previous chapter as the Fool's objection to the argument of *Proslogion III* when this is taken as an independent argument for the existence of *G.* That objection fastened on Anselm's own claim that what does not exist can be conceived not to exist. Whatever the nature of *G,* however it may (a priori) escape all the Conditions for being conceivably nonexistent, if it does not exist, it can be conceived not to exist. So it looked as if the Fool had to be *antecedently* convinced of the existence of *G*—by *Proslogion II*—before he could reasonably be brought to accept that *G* (or anything) cannot be conceived not to exist. In other words, it looked as if there were, or might be, two *independently necessary conditions* for something not to be conceivably nonexistent: having a nature such as to escape all the Conditions, and actually existing. The *Reply* argues, in effect, that these two conditions are not independent. If something fails to exist, we now learn, it could be conceived not to exist *even if it existed:* "Whatever can be conceived and does not exist *would, if it existed,* be able not to exist . . . for the mind" (R 1)—that is, would be able to be conceived as nonexistent. But if *G* existed, it could *not* be conceived not to exist, since it would meet *both* the criteria for not being conceivably nonexistent. It would, in virtue of its nature, escape all the Conditions; and it would exist. Anything else—any conceivable anything else—would, on the other hand, be conceivably nonexistent even if it existed, since, in virtue of its nature, it meets at least one of the Conditions for being conceivably nonexistent. Escaping all the Conditions, we now see, is not only a necessary but a *sufficient* condition for not being conceivably nonexistent. It suffices, because it suffices for the other, supposedly independent necessary condition to be fulfilled: that the

thing actually exist. We can, therefore, determine, wholly a priori, by a consideration of thing's nature alone, whether it can be conceived not to exist or not—without qualification.

This filling of the dialectical loophole in the *Proslogion III* argument is totally dependent on Anselm's metaphysical views, which surface and inform the arguments in the *Reply* in a way that they do not in the *Proslogion*. These metaphysical views are, from a modern perspective, not only striking, but strikingly implausible. At their heart is the contention that only things of a certain nature can fail to exist. Only things (conceivable things) that are composite and temporal in nature can fail to exist. If anything can even be conceived that has a different nature, it exists. Since *G* can be conceived as having such a nature—indeed, *must* be conceived as having such a nature—*G* exists. From a modern perspective this seems absurd. How could a sheer *kind* of thing guarantee its own existence? Numbers and suchlike "abstract entities" if you are a "Platonist," perhaps. But something as substantial as God (or *G*)? In the following chapter we shall consider an argument of Anselm's in the *Reply* that we have not yet considered (since it is clearly not a version of the Modal Ontological Argument), where this metaphysical setting for Anselm's argumentation in the *Reply* is more clearly in evidence. This argument will give us an introduction to what I have, throughout this work, been building up to: Anselm's "other argument."

6

ANSELM'S OTHER ARGUMENT

In the previous chapter we saw how in his *Reply* to Gaunilo Anselm presents a number of arguments for the existence of *G* that are independent of the traditional Ontological Argument of *Proslogion II*. We considered the suggestion that these arguments are, perhaps implicitly, versions of the Modal Ontological Argument, and found this not to be so. The arguments in question are, rather, grounded on highly contentious, not to say implausible, metaphysical views. We have seen, for example, that Anselm holds that anything can fail to exist only if something else does exist—something that has the power to prevent the first thing from existing. Why should we believe this?

The *Reply* also contains another argument for the existence of *G* that we have not yet looked at. We have not looked at it because it is not concerned with the issue of conceivable nonexistence, and so has no claim to be considered a version of the Modal Ontological Argument. This argument will now, however, command our attention, since it is, or it at least implicitly contains, the ultimate subject of the present work: Anselm's "other argument." The argument in question would not have been regarded by Anselm as independent of the arguments in the *Reply* that we considered in the previous chapter. He would have held that this argument is sound if and only if the others are. In this argument, however, the metaphysics is closer to the surface, and it can be seen as providing some sort of justification for the contentious metaphysical principles on which the other arguments in the *Reply* are based. It is certainly, in my view, the most compelling argument that Anselm ever offered for the existence of *G*. Since the argument is wholly a priori in nature, it could perhaps be viewed as a form of Ontological Argument. Since it is firmly grounded on substantive metaphysics, it could be called the *Metaphysical Ontological Argument*. The name is not important, however; the argument is. Here it is:

> Something than which a greater cannot be conceived cannot be conceived to exist except without a beginning. But whatever can be conceived to exist and does not exist can be conceived to exist with a beginning. Therefore, something than which a greater cannot be conceived cannot be conceived to exist and yet not exist. If, therefore, it can be conceived to exist, of necessity it exists. (R 1)[1]

Since Anselm holds that something than which a greater cannot be conceived can at least be conceived to exist, he concludes that *G* actually exists.

The first premise of the argument is relatively straightforward. Having a beginning indicates an ontological limitation of a sort that is incompatible with being *G*. As Anselm himself would look at the matter, it is incompatible with the "supreme truth" with which *G* must be conceived to exist. It is the second premise that is the controversial one. I shall, indeed, from now on refer to it as the "crucial premise." Few people, I imagine, will see any reason at all to accept it. Many, indeed, will feel an intuitive resistance to the very strong claim that if something—*anything*—does not exist, it can be conceived to have a beginning if it can be conceived at all. This premise would certainly be true if the only way that something that does not actually exist could have existed is by its *coming into* existence. But why should we believe that? After all, most people who deny God's existence do not suppose that it makes much sense to suppose that God could possibly come into existence. Many such people allow the bare possibility that God (or a divine being) should have existed; and they hold that if He had, He would indeed have existed eternally (or sempiternally). It is just a fact, however, that He does not actually exist. This may seem a perfectly coherent position. So the crucial premise cries out for justification. And yet Anselm does not attempt to justify it in this stretch of text. Nor does he explicitly argue for it anywhere else. How might he have justified it?

The crucial premise is straightforwardly derivable from two other claims that Anselm makes later in the *Reply.* One is the claim with which we were much concerned in the previous chapter: "What does not exist is able not to exist, and what is able not to exist can be conceived not to exist" (R 5). Once again, we are particularly interested in what this implies: namely, that if something does not exist, it can be conceived not to exist. The other relevant claim is that if something "could be conceived not to exist, it could be conceived to have a beginning" (R 3). These two together allow us to infer the crucial premise: if something does not exist, it can be conceived

to have a beginning. However, although it is easy in this way to derive the crucial premise, this hardly counts as a full justification unless Anselm can offer a justification of these other two claims. The first—that if something does not exist, it can be conceived not to exist—will doubtless meet with little opposition from contemporary readers. Indeed, it may be thought hardly to need a justification at all, so evident is it. As we saw in the previous chapter, however, this claim is not for Anselm quite as straightforward as it may appear to us. For the present, however, let us suppose that it is in order. It is the other claim that is obviously questionable: that what can be conceived not to exist, can be conceived to have a beginning. This is quite as much in need of justification as the crucial premise itself, and for more or less the same reason. We shall, however, seek in vain in Anselm's writings for any explicit justification of it. Are there, though, passages in Anselm that provide at least implicit support for it—or for the crucial premise itself?

Having a beginning is something that is repeatedly mentioned in the Conditions passages to which I have frequently made reference. If something has a beginning of its existence, we are told, it can be conceived not to exist (P22, R 4). The relevance of this to a possible justification of the principle that what can be conceived not to exist can be conceived to have a beginning may, however, seem obscure for two reasons. In the first place, this Condition concerns things that *actually* have a beginning, whereas we are interested in whether something can be *conceived as* having a beginning. This discrepancy can, however, be overcome, since Anselm certainly held that if something can just be *conceived* as having a beginning, it can be conceived as not ever existing. Something analogous also holds for all the other Conditions for conceivable nonexistence. Not only is this pretty obvious in itself, it is implied by various things Anselm explicitly says. For example, *G* cannot be conceived as having a beginning (R 1, 3). So, if something *can* be conceived as having a beginning, it is not *G*. Being wholly simple and eternal, however, suffices for being *G* (R 8). So, if something can be conceived as having a beginning, it is not wholly simple and eternal. But anything other than what is wholly simple and eternal can be conceived not to exist (R 1). Therefore, whatever can be conceived as having a beginning can be conceived not to exist.

This, however, gives us the second problem, because what we have just derived is precisely the reverse of what we are seeking: namely, that what can be conceived not to exist can be conceived as having a beginning. In the Conditions passages Anselm only ever presents actually having a beginning

as a *sufficient* condition for being conceivably nonexistent, never as a *necessary* one. Indeed, Anselm implies that it is *not* a necessary condition. This is already indicated by the fact, for which I have just argued, that Anselm held that what can be conceived to have a beginning, *even if it actually does not,* can be conceived not to exist at all. It is also implied by a passage where Anselm considers the theoretical possibility of something that has neither a beginning nor an end, but which is temporal. Anselm asserts that such a thing is not *G* (R 8). Since Anselm holds that *only G* cannot be conceived not to exist (P 3, R 4), this implies that such a thing can be conceived not to exist despite the fact that it has no beginning. Could Anselm have thought, however, that *conceivably* having a beginning is a necessary condition for something to be conceivable as nonexistent? If he did, then we could derive the crucial premise as follows: If something is nonexistent, it can be conceived not to exist; if something can be conceived not to exist, it can be conceived as having a beginning; therefore, if something is nonexistent, it can be conceived as having a beginning. I shall now argue that various claims that Anselm makes do indeed entail the thesis that conceivably having a beginning is a necessary condition for being conceivably nonexistent.

One thing that may not be immediately apparent from Anselm's Conditions passages is that Anselm took all of his conditions for conceivable nonexistence—and they are presented as being exhaustive (R1, R8)—to apply *only to temporal beings*. That he is committed to this position is indicated by the fact that, for him, *only G* is not conceivably nonexistent, and *only G* is above time (R 8). Temporal beings, because they have a past that no longer exists, and a future that is yet to be, do not exist "properly and absolutely" (P 22). In other words, they lack that "supremely true" mode of existence that pertains to *G* in virtue of which it cannot be conceived not to exist. It is because, and only because, the existence of *G* is, in the classic phrase, *tota simul,* that there is no purchase for the procedure of thinking away parts of its existence that features so prominently in Anselm's discussion of why the Conditions are indeed conditions for conceivable nonexistence. Most of these conditions are explicitly temporal in character—such as having a beginning, having an end, and having temporal parts (or not existing at every time "as a whole," as Anselm sometimes puts it: e.g., R 4). Again, in a passage where Anselm lays out what it is, in terms of nature and mode of existence, that is necessary and sufficient in order to be *G,* he mentions not needing, and not being forced, to change or move (R 8). Since, necessarily, *G* and only *G* cannot be conceived not to exist, needing or be-

ing forced to change or move are, by implication, also conditions for being conceivably nonexistent. They, too, however, apply only to temporal beings. The only other Conditions that Anselm mentions are having spatial parts and existing in a circumscribed place. Although Anselm does not explicitly relate the former to temporality, he would surely have regarded the connection as obvious. It is certainly not difficult to supply him with an argument for it. For, as Anselm does explicitly say, a composite entity can be conceived as disintegrating into its parts (P 18, EIV 4). But such disintegration would be something that *happened* to the thing; and happenings are temporal occurrences. A non-temporal being, however, cannot even be conceived as participating in such a happening. So, only temporal beings can have spatial parts. Again, a thing's disintegration is a matter of it coming to an end; and only temporal beings can even conceivably come to an end. It is the connection between spatial location and temporality that is the least obvious. "What does not exist here but does exist there," claims Anselm, "can be conceived not to exist anywhere just as it does not exist here" (R 1). Why, however, did Anselm believe that such a thing must be temporal in nature? Perhaps his thought was that, given that *some* things in space are temporal in nature (and, at the very least, that it is possible, or conceivable, for a temporal being to be located in space), any being that existed in space would participate in the same temporal "flow" as its (possible) temporal "co-habitants" in space. Or perhaps he thought that anything in space can at least be conceived to move: something that is in principle possible only for a temporal being. I shall, however, not pursue this matter, since the thesis that, necessarily, anything spatial is temporal is hardly one of Anselm's more contentious claims.

Even if Anselm's Conditions for conceivable nonexistence are satisfied only by temporal beings, how does this advance matters? When Anselm provides a justification for his various Conditions, he argues from *partial* nonexistence to the conceivability of *total* nonexistence. If a thing exists here, but not there, we can conceive it existing nowhere. More relevantly for our purposes, if a thing exists now, but not then, we can conceive it never existing: if each individual part of a thing does not exist when other parts exist, "all of its parts, and therefore the whole itself, can be conceived never to exist" (R 1). Anselm follows Augustine (e.g., *Conf.* 11.14.17) in viewing the "flow" of time as a succession of fleeting, perishing moments, and the persistence of a temporal being as a similar succession of momentary existences. Strictly speaking, they both held, a temporal being exists only *now*. Its past existence is no more, even though we say that a thing has "persisted."

Since non-being in this way attaches even to a continuously existing temporal object, Anselm can apply his standard procedure of inferring from partial to conceivably total nonexistence. If a thing has existed for, say, the last ten years, we can, on the basis of the fact that all of its existence save its present existence no longer is, conceive that it should never have existed. If, however, we can bring off this cognitive feat, we can also, Anselm would surely have held, bring off the lesser feat of conceiving that some presently existing temporal object did not exist prior to some point or other in the past, even if it did. But this is just to conceive the thing as beginning to exist. If this is right, then since everything that can be conceived not to exist is a temporal being, everything that can be conceived not to exist can be conceived to have a beginning.

A problem may, however, be thought to be posed for this interpretation by time itself. In the very passage I have been discussing, Anselm infers from the fleeting nature of time that all of the parts of time, and hence time itself, can be conceived not to exist (R 1). But can time be conceived to have beginning? The absolutely standard view throughout this period was, in fact, that time *actually* had a beginning. Not a beginning "in time," of course; but a beginning nevertheless. Time "began" with the Creation, since time exists only when there are changeable (and perhaps changing) beings in existence.[2] It would be astonishing if Anselm departed from this common view, especially given that Augustine in particular subscribed to it (e.g., *De Gen. ad litt.* 5.5.12.). It is true that in the passage we are considering, Anselm states that time can be conceived not to exist "even if it is said that time always exists." It may be, however, that Anselm is here using the term "always" in a strict temporal sense, and is saying that there is (obviously) no *time* when time did not exist. If he is not saying this (as I think is more likely), then he is merely entertaining for the sake of argument a supposition that he does not himself accept. The very phrasing—"even if it is said"—suggests this. That Anselm did not accept the suggestion is, moreover, strongly implied by his assertion elsewhere that "You [*sc.* God] fill and embrace all things; You are before and beyond all things. You are indeed before all things, because You are before they were made" (P 20). This implies that God is "before" even time, since, as Anselm states elsewhere, "time is something" (M 20).[3]

If Anselm did hold, as I have just argued, that if a thing is temporal, it can be conceived as having a beginning, the "crucial premise" can be seen as the upshot of the following argument:

Whatever can be conceived to exist and does not exist can be conceived not to exist.
Whatever can be conceived not to exist is temporal in nature (i.e., necessarily, if it existed, it would exist in time, or would be time).
Whatever is temporal in nature and can be conceived as existing can be conceived as having a beginning.
Therefore, whatever can be conceived to exist and does not exist can be conceived to exist with a beginning.

Although, at the moment, we are concerned to try and understand Anselm, and not to assess the merits of his position, it is perhaps worth noting now that there is a way of avoiding an objection that some will immediately have to the third premise of this argument: that whatever is temporal in nature and can be conceived as existing can be conceived as having a beginning. Some will object to the claim on the basis of the currently popular thesis of the necessity of origin. If a certain temporal thing has existed forever, could that very thing be even conceived as having come into existence at some point in time? What would make it *that* thing, rather than merely something qualitatively identical to it with an origin in the past? The matter is at least disputable. An argument for Anselm's "crucial premise," or something very like it, can, however, be constructed that makes reference to *kinds* of things, rather than to individuals. The third premise would then have it that every kind of temporal thing is such that we can conceive an instance of that kind coming into existence. When the rest of the argument is tailored accordingly, we have an argument for the following variation of the crucial premise: If a certain kind of thing does not exist (i.e., there is no instance of this kind), we can conceive something of that kind to have a beginning. This will feed into a proof of the existence of *G,* since we cannot conceive of anything of the kind *such that none greater can be conceived* coming into existence.

Anselm intimates that the original argument of his that we began with has a variant. This variant is worth noting, because it entirely escapes the problem raised by the doctrine of the necessity of origin we have just considered. I have quoted Anselm as writing that if something could be conceived not to exist, it could be conceived to have a beginning (R 3). What he writes more fully, however, is that such a thing could be conceived to have a beginning *and an end.* This, when put together with the claim that what does not exist can be conceived not to exist, sustains the following

variant of the crucial premise: Whatever can be conceived to exist and does not exist can be conceived as having an end of its existence. Anselm's original argument can then be reformulated by substituting "end" for "beginning." This variant of Anselm's crucial premise can be derived from the Conditions passages in a way that parallels the foregoing derivation of the original crucial premise. Indeed, the derivation is even more straightforward, since Anselm *explicitly* claims that everything other than God—everything, therefore, that can be conceived not to exist—can be conceived to have an end, even if it does not (P 20). I take it that the reason why Anselm is more explicit here than he was in relation to the issue of having a beginning is that, whereas Anselm thought that nothing other than God lacked a beginning, he thought that there indeed are things that will never have an end. The very passage to which I have just alluded clearly treats "those things that will have no end" and that can yet be conceived to have an end as *actual* things.[4]

Another, quite different basis for the (original) "crucial premise" can also be extracted from Anselm's writings. This time we turn not to the Conditions passages, but to Anselm's discussion of causality. This is relevant to the crucial premise, because Anselm holds that if anything is caused to exist, it begins to exist. On one occasion, for example, simply of the basis of the assumption that something was "made," or caused to exist, Anselm refers to what was "before" that thing (M, 9).[5] Elsewhere Anselm contrasts the one being that is what it is "through itself" with a being that "from nothing becomes [*fit*] whatever it is through something other than itself" (M 26; cf. M 28). He also states that the term "effect" is properly applied only to something that begins to exist *(incepit esse):* that, as he puts it, progresses *(proficit)* from non-being to being (PSS, 10). The principle that if a thing is caused to exist, it begins to exist, will deliver the crucial premise if it is conjoined either with the claim that if a thing does not actually exist, then, if it did exist, it would have a cause of its existence, or with the weaker claim that such a nonexistent thing can at least be *conceived* as having a cause of its existence. And Anselm did endorse both of these latter claims. This can be demonstrated in two stages.

First, Anselm held that it is necessary that a *per se* being—one that (as far as its nature is concerned) could not possibly be caused to exist—be eternal. Aseity entails eternity. That Anselm held this is implied by his as-

sertion that, necessarily, God *alone* exists *per se* and is eternal (e.g., M 24, 28; P 5; R 8). Indeed, in the order of Anselm's exposition, in both the *Proslogion* and the *Monologion,* it is God's (or *G*'s, or the supreme essence's) *per se* mode of existence—that is, its aseity—that is discussed and demonstrated first, and eternity is later inferred from it. When, in the *Proslogion,* after having proved the actual existence of *G,* and identified it with God, Anselm goes on to discuss the nature of this being, aseity is ascribed to it immediately, before eternity is mentioned: "What then are You, Lord God, than Whom nothing greater can be conceived? Indeed, what are You, unless You are the greatest of all things, *existing through Yourself,* and You created everything else from nothing?" (P 5). And in the *Monologion* the concept of aseity (existing *"per se"* in Anselm's terminology) is introduced into the proof itself of the existence of a "supreme essence" almost at the start of the whole work (M 3). Eternity is not ascribed to it until considerably later (M18).[6]

Not only is it clear that Anselm held the thesis that aseity entails eternity, he provides more than enough material to argue for it. For example, Anselm characterizes temporal beings as confined by and dependent upon time and time's "law" (M 22). But time "is something" (M 20). So, everything temporal is dependent upon and governed by something other than itself—at least time. This is not possible for a wholly autonomous, self-sufficient *per se* being (P 22). So, a *per se* being cannot be temporal. Again, if something (or, at least, a kind of thing) is temporal, it can, as we have seen, be conceived to have a beginning. But a *per se* being cannot be conceived to have a beginning (M 18). So, a *per se* being cannot be temporal: in other words, it is eternal. There is, finally, the passage in the *Reply* where Anselm presents various grades of greatness in beings, building up to that than which no greater can be conceived. That which has a beginning but no end is greater than that which has both; and that which has neither, "even if it always passes from the past, through the present, to the future," is greater still. Anselm then presents one higher grade of greatness, than which none higher can even be conceived. The sort of being in question is characterized as "that which in no way needs to or is compelled to change or move" (R 8). Now, the fact that Anselm has been moving up the scale of greatness step by step, at each stage eliminating one and only one deficiency, very strongly suggests, given that we have reached the acme, that not needing or being compelled to change or move, and the immediately preceding condition of being temporal (passing from the past, through the present, to the future), are meant as exhaustive alternatives. In other words, something is temporal if and only if it needs or is compelled to change. Indeed,

for Anselm, this is just what it is for something to be temporal: to be subjected to change. Anything that is necessarily free from such subjection is wholly outside of time. It is, in the traditional sense, eternal. A causally autonomous, *a se* being is, of course, entirely free from such need or compulsion. So, such a being is eternal. In case it may be thought that it is too strong to require of any temporal being that it either needs or will be compelled to change, Anselm provides materials for reaching the desired conclusion from the weaker claim that anything temporal is at least changeable. A *per se* being not only exists through itself, it "is what it is" only through itself (M 4, 24). Anselm infers from this that it cannot possibly change. Not only is it unalterable, since it has no accidents (M 24); it cannot change in respect of either substance or accidents (M 25). In short, it "cannot be other than it is" (M 23). Moreover, whatever is absolutely (and essentially) simple cannot change. As Anselm says of the "supreme essence" of the *Monologion,* "It is not in any way composite, but is supremely simple and unchangeable" (M 21). A *per se* being, however, is absolutely simple (M 17).

The second stage in this derivation of the crucial premise appeals to two principles we have already seen Anselm endorse. The first is that what does not exist can be conceived not to exist. The second is that only what is temporal can be conceived not to exist. From these two principles we can conclude that if something does not exist, it is temporal in nature: that is, it is not eternal. We have just seen, however, that if something is *per se,* it is eternal: that is to say, *only* eternal things are *per se*. So, if something is temporal, it is not *per se*. This means that it can be conceived to be caused. Indeed, if something is not *per se,* necessarily it *will* be caused if it exists at all, since nothing exists through nothing (M, 3, 6). But if something can be conceived to be caused to exist, it can be conceived to begin to exist, since for Anselm, as we have seen, the notion of being caused to exist involves that of beginning to exist. So, if something does not exist, it can be conceived to have a beginning.

We have discovered two ways in which Anselm could justify his crucial premise. At this stage of our proceedings, however, we are beginning to be concerned not merely with understanding Anselm's arguments, but with assessing their soundness. I have written this book not merely because I think there is an overlooked argument in Anselm, but because there is an

argument that is worth serious consideration. Both the ways of vindicating Anselm's "crucial premise" that we have considered, however, in addition to containing various steps and claims that could no doubt be questioned, face a fundamental drawback, at least from a modern point of view. They both make essential appeal to the notion of eternity, where this is understood in the traditional sense of being wholly outside time. Many today reject the very intelligibility of timeless existence; and most of those who do not reject it outright restrict its application to "abstract objects" such as numbers and propositions. Since we are looking not merely for a justification of the crucial premise that may be found in Anselm's writings, but for a justification that has a chance of being generally persuasive, neither of the justifications just examined is serviceable. Rendering them so would involve nothing less than adequately defending the intelligibility, indeed necessity, of regarding God (or *G*) as essentially atemporal. That is too big a task for the present context.[7] I propose, therefore, to continue our search for a justification for the crucial premise—though now for one that does not involve this contentious issue of timeless existence. In doing this I am sidelining what is arguably the very heart—the Augustinian heart—of Anselm's philosophy. In the present intellectual climate, however, this is all but inevitable. The only alternative would be a full-scale defence of Neoplatonic metaphysics.

Fortunately, it is possible to discover in Anselm's writings a justification for the crucial premise that is entirely independent of the issue of timelessness. Like the second of the previous two lines of argument, this one involves Anselm's claim that whatever is caused to exist begins to exist. Unlike both the preceding arguments, however, it does not rely on the principle that whatever does not exist can be conceived not to exist. It relies, rather, on the principle that whatever does not exist *is able not to exist* (R 5). As we saw in the previous chapter, what lies behind this assertion is Anselm's somewhat involved account of possibilities in terms of abilities and capacities. In particular, Anselm regards this principle as being doubly infelicitous (though true). First, it attributes a capacity or ability to something that does not exist. Secondly, the "ability" in question is actually an ontological weakness or incapacity. As we also know, Anselm regards the truth of the principle as implying that something possesses a power over the thing that "can" not exist. If something does not exist, its "ability" not to exist must be explained by reference to something else that prevents it from existing—if only by not doing that which is necessary for it to exist. But if there is indeed something else that is necessary in order for the thing

in question to exist, this thing does not exist through itself: it is not *per se*. If, however, something is not *per se,* it can be conceived to be caused. Indeed, if it exists it *will* be caused, since (necessarily) nothing exists from nothing (M3, 6). But if it can be conceived to be caused, it can be conceived to begin to exist, since being caused entails beginning to exist. So, if something does not exist, it can be conceived to begin to exist.

Here we have a derivation of the crucial premise that entirely avoids mention of timelessness. Many readers, however, will doubtless feel that we have now simply replaced one highly dubious premise with another. We began with the crucial premise that only what can be conceived to begin to exist fails to exist. That seemed dubious. We then considered the claim that whatever can be conceived not to exist can be conceived to begin to exist. That seemed equally dubious. We then considered the claim that timeless beings can neither fail to exist nor be conceived not to exist. That seemed both dubious and possibly unintelligible. Now we are asked to believe that if something does not exist, something else *does* exist: something else, moreover, that has power over the first. We seem to be hopping from one grossly implausible premise to another. In fact, I believe that the last premise is more immediately amenable to a plausible justification than the others. Indeed, I believe that it is true. In the following chapter I shall do my best to commend it to you.

Before turning to that task, however, a serious weakness in the last derivation of the crucial premise—one independent of Anselm's perhaps peculiar account of possibility—should be noted. For it is highly questionable that being caused to exist implies having a beginning of existence—in the sense that, necessarily, the past history of anything caused is finite in extent. I shall present three problems for this thesis: problems I have chosen because Anselm himself would, I believe, have appreciated their force. The first concerns the relation between God the Father and the other two Persons of the Trinity.[8] It was universally agreed in the tradition in which Anselm was situated that the Father is in some sense the source or origin of the Son, since the Father "begets" the Son. The standard term to express this notion of origin amongst the Greeks was *"archē":* "The Father is the origin [*archē*] of the Son," as St. Athanasius states the matter (*C. Ar,* 1.14). A certain "priority" therefore attaches to the Father.[9] The Latin equivalent to *"archē"* is *"principium."* Both these terms, in their respective languages, had the connotation of a *beginning.* When the terms were applied to the Persons of the Trinity, this connotation had to be set aside, of course, since the Son was understood by everyone, at least after the defeat of "Arianism" in the

fourth century, as being co-eternal with the Father.[10] The "origination" of the Son was an *eternal* origination.[11] In part, perhaps, because Augustine fully subscribed to this view (e.g., *Enn. in Ps.* 2.6; *Ep.* 238.4.24), it became orthodoxy in the West. Anselm certainly accepted it.[12] Now, what is significant is that the Greeks were happy to use the term "cause" *(aition)* to refer to this eternal relation between the Father and the Son: the Father "causes" the Son. To cite just one of many possible illustrations, John of Damascus writes that the Father "is the cause of the Son by nature [*aitios esti tou Huiou phuseōs*]" (*De fid. orth.* 1.8). Indeed, the idea that something should have an origin *(archē)* without having a cause *(aition)* was simply unintelligible for the Greeks. The Damascene writes at one point, for example, that the Father "is without origin [*anarchos*], that is to say, without cause" (*De fid. orth.* 1.8). If it is genuine causation that is being appealed to in such passages, then the notion of causation *must* be conceived as compatible with eternal causation by anyone who subscribes to an orthodox account of the Trinity. Western thinkers, however, with but few exceptions, consistently refused to apply the term "cause" *(causa)* to the Father in relation to the Son; and they were aware of their difference on this matter from the Greeks. Aquinas, for example, writes that "the Greeks employ the term 'cause' [*causa*] and the term 'origin' [*principium*] indifferently; the Latin doctors, however, do not employ the term 'cause', but only the term 'origin' [*sc.* in relation to the Trinity]. The reason for this is that origin is more general than cause" (*ST,* Ia, q. 33, a. 1 ad 1). Still, there is a genuine philosophical issue here that cannot be set aside on mere linguistic grounds. The Greeks had a conception of cause that conflicts with Anselm's claim that there is a necessary connection between being caused to exist and beginning to exist.[13] Anselm cannot simply assume the untenability of this position. Indeed, one of the few exceptions to the general rule that Western thinkers did not apply the language of causality to intra-Trinitarian relations was Anselm's primary influence, Augustine (*De div. quaest.* 16). It is not, therefore, surprising that Anselm himself is willing, albeit with qualifications, and in particular with the rider that this is not to employ the term "properly," to write of the Father causing the Son (PSS, 10).

This special case does not, perhaps, pose an insurmountable problem for Anselm, since what is caused in the Trinity is itself eternal (in the sense of being above time), and could not, Anselm would have held, possibly not exist (or be conceived not to exist). The concept of eternal generation or "causation" was, especially as a result of the Arian controversy, firmly linked to the idea of the Son being caused *from the essence of the Father,* and not either

from nothing or from some independent entity.[14] Such eternal causation was, in short, thought to entail that the effect is the same in essence *(homoousios)* as the cause, and hence as inheriting the full dignity of the cause. This was often expressed by saying that the generation of the Son from the Father was a matter of *natural* causation.[15] In particular, the cause, like the effect, will exist *per se*. Anselm's causal reasoning examined above, on the other hand, concerns what must be true if something *that does not actually exist* were to exist. Anselm would doubtless claim that a narrower, or more "proper," notion of cause is applicable in such a case. Anselm does not, however, tell us what the essential difference is between causality "proper" and causality as it applies to the relation between the Father and the Son. Simply to say that the former, unlike the latter, involves an effect beginning to exist would be deeply unhelpful. Mere wordplay in effect. An indication of a more substantial difference is provided by Anselm's insistence that although the Son is "from" the Father, the Son exists through Himself. That the Son subsists through Himself [*per se*]," writes Anselm, "is not inconsistent with His existing from [*de*] the Father, since He necessarily has this power to exist through Himself from [*ex*] the Father" (M 44). I shall not delve into the complex issues this assertion raises.[16] Suffice it to say that Anselm perhaps has the makings of some response to the present problem in terms of a distinction between causation that does and causation that does not allow the effect to be *per se*.

There are, however, two more serious problems with Anselm's claim that being caused implies beginning to exist, problems that remain even if something like the foregoing explication of "proper" causality is accepted. In the first place, all "*per se* accidents" constitute counter-examples to Anselm's understanding of causation. These are attributes that were held to result necessarily from a thing's essence.[17] Among these were a thing's "properties" *(propria)*. Something is a property in the old technical sense only if, in addition to *necessarily* attaching the subject, it is *unique* to it. A standard example was the power to laugh in human beings. Only human beings have the power to laugh; and they possess this power necessarily, in virtue of being human: that is to say, in virtue of their essence. What is relevant for us is that the relation between a thing—more precisely the thing's essence or nature—and its properties (and other *per se* attributes) was seen as causal. Aquinas, for example, writes that certain features of a thing "are caused by the principles of the species, and are called *propria,* such as man's power to laugh" (*Q. de anima,* a. 12 ad 7; cf. *In Sent. I,* d. 17, q. 1, a. 2 ad 2).[18]

The power to laugh, however, was seen as arising *simultaneously* with the existence of a rational animal nature. An essence can never exist without its properties.

Perhaps the problem of *per se* attributes can be set aside on the grounds that Anselm is concerned with substances, not attributes—though why this distinction should be of import when the issue is the nature of causation as such would have to be explained. There are, however, other somewhat similar possible counter-examples. Certain traditional writers pointed to various phenomena in nature to show that the eternal causal relation between Father and Son in the Trinity is not wholly without parallel in the temporal realm. The relation of the sun to light was one of the most popular. As Gregory Nazianzen writes, "A cause is not always older than those things of which it is the cause: the sun than light, for instance" (*Or.* 29.3). I take it that the light of the sun is not a *per se* attribute of the sun, but something distinct from it that the sun produces. It is true, of course, that in the light of a modern scientific understanding such putative examples of "simultaneous causation" are to be discounted. The relevant point as far as Anselm's argument is concerned, however, is that it is far from clear that all such examples can be set aside on purely a priori grounds (as Anselm seems to imply), or that no such example is so much as a metaphysical possibility.

It is true that both *per se* attributes and the sun's light will themselves have a temporal beginning. My power to laugh began to exist at a certain time along with me; and the sun's light started up when the sun began to exist. This is not really to the point, however, since Anselm believes he can deduce a thing's beginning simply from the fact that it is caused at all. To cause something means generating or giving rise to it, in his view. The type of causation that we find (or can postulate as possible) in the case of *per se* attributes and the light of the sun in and of itself has no such temporal implication. If these things come into existence, it is because their causes do, not because of the nature of causation. Nevertheless, one might insist on the point that none of these (possible) cases strictly counts as a counter-example to Anselm's claim that everything that is caused has a beginning. For that we would need a (non-divine) cause that itself exists without beginning, and an effect that it always produces. And there might well be doubts about whether anything within the world that matches up to this is so much as possible. What about the world as a whole though? This brings us to the third, and most serious, problem case for Anselm's thesis.

Aquinas held both that God can be demonstrated to be the first cause of the world, and yet that the "eternity" (really, sempiternity) of the world cannot be demonstrated. What this combination of views opens up as a possibility, as far as reason without the aid of revelation is concerned, is that God should *always* have caused the world to be—therefore, without the world having a beginning.[19] It is somewhat surprising that Anselm does not consider this as a possible counter-example to his causal thesis. Aquinas, of course, postdates Anselm. Moreover, Aquinas's claim that the non-eternity of the world cannot be demonstrated was unusual for a Christian thinker.[20] Nevertheless, an image that Aquinas employed to illustrate his case is to be found in the writings of St. Augustine, which Anselm knew well. The image, which Augustine attributes to certain "Platonists" (i.e., Neoplatonists), is that of a foot causing a mark in the dust. If the foot had *always* been pressing on the dust in this way, the mark would never have *started* to exist; and yet its existence would be caused by the foot (*De civ.* 10.31). What is significant about this passage is that Augustine does not reject the view of causation that is embodied in the image. Augustine does not, that is to say, insist that the concept of the causation of a temporal being in and of itself implies that the effect begins to exist at some point.[21] All that Augustine is intent upon rejecting in this passage is the thesis that nothing can be without an end unless it is without a beginning. He is intent, in other words, on establishing nothing stronger than that a Creation of the world in time is *possible*, even given that there are some things—namely immortal souls—that will never cease to exist. It is true that later in this work Augustine does argue, on grounds independent of revelation, that the world definitely did have a beginning in time (*De civ.* 12.4.2). Even here, however, he does not base his argument on the nature of causation, but on quite different considerations.[22] Whether or not it is surprising that Anselm did not consider this counter-example to his causal claim, the present line of argument for the "crucial premise," if it is to stand up, needs to exclude it.

Several writers in addition to Augustine argued against the possibility of the world having always existed. Their arguments, however, are almost invariably based, like Augustine's, on issues other than the nature of causation—such as the supposed impossibility of an actual quantitative infinite—and so are not relevant to us. Bonaventure, however, does include in his battery of arguments against this possibility one that specifically concerns the nature of causation (*In II Sent.,* d. 1, p. 1, a. 1, q. 2).[23] Indeed, Bonaventure claims on this ground alone that the supposition that something should be eternally caused not only is contrary to reason, but con-

tains a manifest contradiction. In fact, however, he derives the supposed impossibility of an eternal creation not, as Anselm wishes to do, from the sheer notion of a cause (in the "proper" sense), but specifically from the notion of a "total" cause, which he interprets as involving the creation of both a thing's form and matter. In other words, his argument concerns specifically creation *ex nihilo.*[24] Doubtless, however, this is a legitimate restriction, if it is only the relation between God and the world that is the only serious possible counter-example to Anselm's causal claim. However, even when it is causation *ex nihilo* that it at issue, Bonaventure's argument is unconvincing.[25] Indeed, it is hardly an argument at all. He simply asserts that the creation of something *ex nihilo* involves something having being *after* not being. Of course, one could insist that the term "create" has this temporal implication; but this would be a relatively uninteresting semantic observation. The crucial issue is whether, if the existence of the world is seen as wholly dependent upon God as a sufficient cause, or as wholly issuing from God, there is necessarily this temporal dimension. As Aquinas clearly saw, there is no such necessity. To look at the issue in the way Bonaventure did: Why could God not always have been the cause of both matter and its various forms? If this were the case, the world would be "from nothing" in that it would be neither from God's own substance nor from anything else (such as pre-existent matter). *"Ex nihilo"* simply does not have the temporal implication that Bonaventure supposes it to have.

Bernadino Bonansea (1974: 22–4) has attempted to fill out Bonaventure's argument at this point. What an eternal creation fails to do justice to, he argues, is the idea of *newness* that is essentially involved in the idea of creation. Creation *ex nihilo,* he writes, "involves a transition, as it were, from non-being to being, and consequently, the emergence into existence of a new reality, the beginning of a new existence outside God." If the world has always existed, "there would never have been an original nothingness to begin with." This may initially sound a little more persuasive than Bonaventure's original argument, but it, too, rests on the same unargued assumption that temporality is essentially involved in the notion of *ex nihilo.* "Newness" may simply advert to the fact that the being that is created is wholly different from the nature of the creating being, and that nothing is *transmitted* from the creator to creation (save "being" itself). If it means more than this, the extra needs to be argued for. As for "transition," either this can be interpreted as simply adverting to the efficacy of divine causality—the establishing of something in being; or, if not, it is simply question-begging in the way that Bonaventure's original argument was.

Richard Cross (2006) offers a perhaps more interesting defence of the Bonaventurean position. If the world had no beginning, argues Cross, God cannot be the sufficient cause of the world unless "occasionalism" is true: unless, that is to say, there is no genuine causality within the world, because God is the sufficient cause of everything in the world—including everything that happens in the world.[26] But occasionalism is false. Since, on any remotely orthodox view, God is indeed the sufficient cause of the world, the world must have had a beginning. Cross's thinking, in more detail, goes as follows. If the world had a beginning, there is no problem in regarding God as the sufficient cause of the world compatibly with there being genuine causal agency within the world, because God can be seen as the sufficient cause of the "initial conditions" of the world as a whole. From this initial state the world can then unfold, in part at least, in virtue of natural, worldly causality (which God also established). If, however, the world has always existed, there are no such initial conditions, and the distinction between Creation and Conservation is ultimately abolished. God must, therefore, be thought of as the sufficient cause of the whole course of the world and of everything it contains. But this is sheer occasionalism. There are two points to be made about this argument. The first is that, from the fact that God is the sufficient cause of something in the world, it does not follow that some natural cause may not be causally relevant to it—by being either causally necessary or causally sufficient for it.[27] This is because God may be—and on a traditional conception will be—causally sufficient (as well as necessary) *for the operation* of that natural cause.[28] The second is that in the present context occasionalism would need to be not merely false, but impossible (or inconceivable); and it is far from clear that this is the case.[29] Occasionalism needs to be absolutely ruled out in this way, since otherwise God's eternally creating an occasionalist world would constitute a *possibility* that conflicts with Anselm's causal thesis—a thesis that is presented as (and for the purposes of the argument needs to be) a necessary truth.

So, to sum up: there is, it seems to me, no convincing way of deriving a beginning of existence from the notion of creation *ex nihilo*. In other words, Aquinas's arguments on this point are decisive. Indeed, there seems to be an inconsistency in Anselm's own pronouncements on this subject. On the one hand he is clear that nothing can be conceived other than God and what God causes to exist (M 3–7). On the other hand he allows that we can conceive things that have no beginning (R 8). This entails that we can conceive of things that have no beginning being caused.

Suppose, however, that we weaken Anselm's claim that if something is caused (at least in the "proper" sense), it begins to exist. Let us substitute the claim that even if something can be eternally caused—in the sense that a thing is (properly) caused, but never began to exist—it is possible, or conceivable, that it *should have been* temporally caused—in the sense of being caused in such a way that it had a beginning. In order to avoid the problem that we have seen to arise in connection with the Trinity, we should need to specify that the sort of eternal causation in question holds between causes and effects that are not both *per se*. Moreover, in order to avoid a possible problem arising from the doctrine of the necessity of origin, this weakened thesis needs to be couched in terms of *kinds* of things. So hedged about, however, the thesis may seem not implausible. Although Augustine's footprint was eternally caused, a footprint—some footprint or other—can be temporally caused, of course. And the same goes for the less questionable possibility of an eternally caused world, of which this is a symbol. The weakened causal thesis, thus qualified, would allow us to derive Anselm's crucial premise as follows: If something does not exist, it can be conceived to be caused in such a way that it does not exist *per se;* anything that can be conceived to be caused in this way is of such a kind that an instance of this kind can be conceived to be temporally caused (i.e., to be caused to begin to exist); therefore anything that does not exist is of a kind such that an instance of this kind can be conceived to begin to exist. This would push through Anselm's "other argument," because God (or *G*) is not of a kind such that an instance of that kind can be conceived to be temporally caused.

Even this weakened connection between being caused and having a beginning of existence is dubious, however. Consider, for example, the relation between the One and *Nous* ("Intellect") in Plotinus's metaphysics. *Nous* is "eternally caused" to exist by the One. Moreover, it is different in nature from the One, since it, unlike the One, is not wholly simple. Crucially, it is not *per se*. And yet it is not conceivable that *Nous,* or anything of the nature of *Nous,* should have *begun* to exist, since it is essentially eternal (*Enn*. 3.7.3–6). The same challenge is posed by the relation between God and the various "separated intellects" in Avicenna's metaphysics; and by the relation between God and the world—*natura naturans* and *natura naturata*—in Spinoza. Consider, also, the third "hypostasis" in Plotinus's metaphysics: Soul, which is immediately caused by *Nous*. Unlike both the One and *Nous,* Soul is essentially involved in time; and yet it essentially proceeds eternally from Intellect (*Enn*. 3.7.11–12). (The same problem is

posed by the temporal elements in *natura naturata* in Spinoza's system.) The only way that Anselm could reject these counter-examples to his weakened causal principle is to claim not merely that all these metaphysical systems (and any others that one might adduce) are not even conceivably true (which doubtless he would), but that they are inconceivable at least in part because of the causal claims that they embody. I cannot myself see how such an argument would go. Even in its weakened form, therefore, Anselm's causal principle is too contentious to be serviceable. I suggest we drop it.

If we drop Anselm's causal thesis, in both its original and its weakened versions, we are still in search of a sound justification in his writings for the "crucial premise." In fact, there is none to be found; and I, for one, regard this premise, presented as it is as a necessary and a priori truth, as unacceptable. All is not lost, however, as far as Anselm's "other argument" is concerned. For suppose that we do not take the last step in the third justification of the crucial premise. We do not, that is to say, infer from the fact that if something is (or can be conceived to be) caused, it has (or can be conceived to have) a beginning. We should still have the penultimate conclusion: that if something does not exist, it can be conceived to have a cause. If we insert this into Anselm's argument in place of the original "crucial premise," and make compensating substitutions elsewhere, the following argument results:

> Something than which a greater cannot be conceived cannot be conceived to exist except without a cause. But whatever can be conceived to exist and does not exist can be conceived to be caused. Therefore, something than which a greater cannot be conceived cannot be conceived to exist and yet not exist. If, therefore, it can be conceived to exist, of necessity it exists.

Given the background assumption that *G* can be conceived to exist, it follows that *G* actually exists. This argument is, of course, one that Anselm himself did not offer. It is, however, implicit in Anselm's reasoning—in the way that no Modal Ontological Argument is. This is not just because this argument deals with the sorts of causal and metaphysical issues that are at the centre of Anselm's concerns; and it is not just because the argument is

both consistent with Anselm's views, and actually sustained by them: it is, more significantly, because the argument that Anselm actually offered—employing, as it does, the "crucial premise"—can be seen as deriving from a line of thought where Anselm simply takes one step too far: namely, in arguing from *being caused* to *having a beginning*. Anselm presented the argument as he did because he accepted an entailment that actually fails to hold. The argument I have just presented embodies the perhaps *defensible substance* of Anselm's line of thought.

Not only is the above argument implicit in the thinking that may well have led Anselm to propound his original argument, and not only is it in any case sustained by his various relevant philosophical pronouncements: by invoking the notion of causality *it makes explicit something that is in the background of all the other arguments in the* Reply *that we investigated in the previous chapter.* As we saw there, all these other arguments feature Anselm's causal understanding of abilities. Something "can" fail to exist, in his view, only if it is of a certain nature: specifically, of a nature such that something of a different nature has causal power over it. In other words, a thing can fail to exist—and anything that does not exist "can" fail to exist—only if it is not a *per se* being: that is, only if it can be caused to exist. Moreover, a thing can be conceived not to exist only if it is of such a nature. "What does not exist is able not to exist; and what is able not to exist can be conceived not to exist" (R 5). Here, as I stressed in the previous chapter, Anselm grounds such conceivability on the *nature* of what does not exist. In particular, we have seen the fundamental role of *G*'s existing "absolutely" or "most truly" in Anselm's case for claiming that *G* cannot be conceived not to exist. But the very first time such a notion is introduced is in connection with aseity: "Whatever exists through something else exists less than that through which all other things exist, and which alone exists through itself [*per se*]. For that which exists through itself of all things exists most greatly [*maxime*]" (M 3). Moreover, in the one passage where Anselm explicitly states the conditions that *suffice* for something to be such that nothing greater than it can be conceived, the crucial element is that a thing be such that it neither needs nor is compelled to change (R 8). It is true that Anselm often explicates the greatness of God in terms of His eternity. In contrast to God, temporal things "barely exist," because of their changeable and fleeting mode of existence (M 28). Even in this passage, however, Anselm relates barely existing to a lack of aseity: "Since all things [other than the supreme essence] have come into being from not being, not through themselves but through something else; and since, as far as they themselves are concerned,

they return from being to not being unless they are sustained by something else: how does existing simply, or perfectly and absolutely, apply to them, and not, rather, barely existing or almost not existing?" None of this applies to the supreme essence—and so it exists perfectly and absolutely—precisely because it is "through itself." It is also true that in the Conditions passages, which are Anselm's most explicit discussions of what it takes to be able to conceive something as nonexistent, it is temporal considerations that bulk large. But what is it for something to be temporal, according to Anselm? It is, as we have seen, for it to be changeable—indeed, to need or to be forced to change. The very notion of temporality is, for Anselm, ultimately causally grounded. Necessarily, only a *per se* being is above time: above the flux that both suffices for and is essential to time. Hence, as I pointed out earlier in this chapter, in both the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion* Anselm first establishes the aseity of God (or the supreme essence, or *G*), and only then eternity.

Not only is it the case that all the arguments in Anselm's *Reply* that are of concern to us turn on metaphysical issues having to do with causality, they can all be seen as different ways of spelling out the implications of the following principle: *If anything that cannot be conceived to be caused can be conceived to exist, it actually exists*. Alternatively: *If something can be conceived to exist but does not exist, it can be conceived to be caused*. That this principle underpins the argument that I have in the course of the present chapter finally extracted from Anselm's *Reply* is clear if we attend to the second premise of that argument: Whatever can be conceived to exist and does not exist can be conceived to be caused. Contraposition gives us the equivalent premise that if anything cannot be conceived to be caused, either it cannot be conceived to exist or it does exist. In other words, if anything that cannot be conceived to be caused can be conceived to exist, it actually exists. It is almost as clear that the principle in question also underpins all the other arguments in the *Reply* that we considered in the previous chapter, since they all turn on the claim that if something does not exist, it is "able" not to exist. This, for Anselm, means that something has a causal power over the "being" in question: something that prevents "it" from existing. This implies that the being in question is not uncausable—for, given that it is *possible* for such a thing to exist, its existence in every such possible situation would be causally dependent upon its not being prevented from existing. The only things that can be prevented from existing are things that, when they exist, exist *ab alio*. They fail to exist when certain causal preconditions are denied them. This is the background understanding of abilities

that informs all the arguments in the *Reply* that we considered in the previous chapter. Consider, by way of illustration, the argument in *Reply I,* which we considered in greatest detail in the previous chapter. Its crucial premise, you will recall, is the following: "Whatever can be conceived and does not exist would, if it existed, be able not to exist either in reality or for the mind." Here, as I have argued, Anselm is relying on the thesis that if something, X, does not exist, it is of such a nature that it is possible to conceive of something else that has such causal power over X that it can prevent X from existing. But, if X is *G*—namely, a being that can be conceived, but that cannot be conceived except as uncaused and uncausable—there is no conceivable thing that could have such power over it. Hence, it actually exists. This argument, too, is based on the above Principle: If anything that cannot be conceived to be caused can be conceived to exist, it actually exists. I offer this Principle as an alternative to what Hartshorne dubs "Anselm's Principle" as the crucial fundamental principle that informs all of Anselm's arguments for the existence of *G* other than the traditional Ontological Argument of *Proslogion II* (and the essentially Neoplatonic argument of the *Monologion* that we are ignoring). Indeed, I shall, henceforth, refer to it, in its various logically equivalent formulations, as *Anselm's Principle*.

All the arguments in the *Reply* to Gaunilo that are relevant to us can be seen as simply a matter of putting this Principle together with the claim that *G* is conceivable, but not conceivably caused, and thence inferring that *G* actually exists. It is this "*Ur*-argument" that I finally offer as Anselm's "other argument" for the existence of *G*. One way of stating it is as follows:

> If anything that cannot be conceived to be caused can be conceived to exist, it actually exists.
> *G* can be conceived to exist but cannot be conceived to be caused.
> Therefore, *G* actually exists.

In the following and concluding chapter, we shall see how it stands up to scrutiny.

Before proceeding to that task—philosophically the most important in the present work—I should like to say something about Charles Hartshorne and Norman Malcolm, with whose ideas we began the present investigation. Although I earlier focused on Hartshorne's famous logical formulation of the Modal Ontological Argument, his extensive writings on the Ontological Argument are full of metaphysical claims, many concerning the point now at issue, which he regarded as underpinning the soundness of his formal

argument. Indeed, Hartshorne's writings as a whole show an acute understanding of Anselm's position. Consider, for example, the following: "If perfection actually or even possibly fails to exist, then it is such that, 'even should it exist,' as Anselm says, it would exist only by accident, that is on sufferance of some condition or chance, and this means precariously, dependently, derivatively (with a beginning, with parts, etc.)—in a word, as Descartes well says, imperfectly" (Hartshorne and Reese 1953: 97). We find a similar passage in the very work that presented the formal version of the Modal Ontological Argument: "To exist contingently is to exist precariously, or by chance. . . . But to exist precariously or by chance is an imperfection, appropriate only to imperfect individuals. That 'humanity' might not have been at all means that each of us exists, and has any particular excellence, thanks to accidental factors only. This total dependence on the way things happen to be, this radical 'iffyness' or precariousness of our existence and nature . . . is a defect in principle" (Hartshorne 1962: 61). Since Hartshorne regards as contingent anything that exists with less than logical necessity, it might be suggested that Hartshorne is guilty of a somewhat gross confusion. Is he not simply conflating logical contingency with dependency, and, hence, logical necessity with aseity or "factual necessity"?[30] In fact there is no such confusion. Whether or not he was in error, Hartshorne knew precisely what he was doing. From his earliest writings on this subject onwards, Hartshorne viewed all possibility and necessity in terms of a quasi-Aristotelian understanding of potentiality—one that bears a distinct resemblance to that of Anselm.[31]

Norman Malcolm, too, was attuned to the metaphysical dimension of Anselm's thought. Witness, for example, the following passage from his "bombshell" paper: "In *Responsio* I Anselm adds the following acute point: if you can conceive of a certain thing and this thing does not exist then if it *were* to exist its non-existence would be *possible*. It follows, I believe, that if the thing were to exist it would depend on other things both for coming into and continuing in existence, and also that it would have duration and not eternity" (Malcolm 1960: 48). Whether or not the things Malcolm mentions do indeed "follow," Anselm certainly thought they did. I have suggested that one of things mentioned by Malcolm does not follow: namely, that such a thing would come into existence. A sempiternal but contingent being is surely not impossible (or inconceivable). I have suggested, however, that we leave the issue of eternity to one side, since it is too big and complex a topic. If we excise this from Malcolm's list of what "follows," however, what we find is, in effect, an expression of what I have identified as

Anselm's Principle. In this one short passage Malcolm put his finger on the essential element in Anselm's thought in this area. It cannot be said, however, that Malcolm offers anything in the way of a justification of this clearly metaphysical element in his argument. "It follows, I believe . . ." is all he offers us. I also do not find any such justification in Hartshorne's more extensive writings on this subject. His discussions always bottom out into brute assertion at the crucial points. It is time to see what can positively be said on behalf of Anselm's Principle, and his "other argument."

7

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE ARGUMENT

In the previous chapter I extracted a thesis from Anselm's writings that I dubbed "Anselm's Principle." In one of its possible formulations it is the following: *If anything that cannot be conceived to be caused can be conceived to exist, it actually exists*. I claimed that it forms the basis of Anselm's "other argument" for the existence of *G*. That argument, in a corresponding formulation, runs as follows:

> If anything that cannot be conceived to be caused can be conceived to exist, it actually exists.
> *G* can be conceived to exist but cannot be conceived to be caused.
> Therefore, *G* exists.

In this concluding chapter I shall assess the merits of this argument. Before turning to that, however, I propose to modify Anselm's Principle and its associated argument. As it stands, the Principle makes reference to what is and is not conceivable. I propose to replace this with an appeal to what is and is not possible—*absolutely* or "metaphysically" or "broadly logically" possible. I have repeatedly done this earlier in the present work, and Chapter 2 presents my justification for this procedure. The reason earlier for making such a modal "translation" of some of Anselm's claims was that we were in search of a Modal Ontological Argument in Anselm's writings. That search is now over. I have concluded that it is a wild goose chase. The reason for persisting with the translation is that we are now concerned with the question of how convincing Anselm's "other argument" is, and there is simply no consensus concerning what does and does not follow from the fact that something can or cannot be conceived—nor even concerning what is and is not conceivable. People feel on firmer ground when possibility is in ques-

tion.[1] With this modification, Anselm's Principle becomes the thesis that *if anything that cannot be caused can exist, it actually exists*. Alternatively: *if anything can exist but does not exist, it can be caused*. This principle is perhaps more familiar from the writings of Duns Scotus. Scotus begins a complex argument for God's existence by arguing at some length that it is possible for an uncausable being to exist. He follows this by arguing that if anything cannot possibly be caused (or possibly exist from something else: *posse esse ab alio*), it can exist *a se* if it can exist at all. He then makes the decisive claim that if anything does not actually exist *a se,* it *cannot* exist *a se—"quod non est a se non potest esse a se"*—and thereby concludes that an uncausable being actually exists (*De primo princ*. 3.19). The decisive claim is equivalent to (since it is the contrapositive of) "Anselm's Principle" that an *a se,* or uncausable, being is possible only if it is actual.

I also propose to modify Anselm's Principle in one further respect. This, too, will be familiar from earlier discussions in the present work. So as to avoid qualms about possibly nonexistent intentional objects involved in Anselm's claim that if "something" does not exist, "it" is causable if it is possible, I propose as before to discuss matters in terms of *kinds* of thing. Moreover, since Anselm's original arguments concerned what is and is not conceivable (now possible) with respect to *one and the same* intentional object, the kinds in question are to be *essential kinds:* kinds such that, necessarily, if anything is of such a kind, it is an instantiation of that kind in every possible situation in which it exists.[2] That we need such a restriction to essential kinds in the present connection is made clear by the following example. Anselm believed that God (i.e., *G*) turned Lot's wife into a pillar of salt, but did not turn Lot into salt, though He could have (since God is omnipotent). Consider the following somewhat contrived "kind": *is G and such that it turns Lot to salt*. Even if something of kind *G* exists, nothing of this more complex kind does, since nothing turned Lot himself to salt. An unqualified rendering of Anselm's Principle in terms of (perhaps inessential) kinds would license the inference that if it is possible for something of this complex kind not to exist, it is possible for something of this kind to be caused. Anselm, however, would have denied this, since anything of this more complex kind is at least of kind *G;* and Anselm denies that anything of this kind can conceivably (possibly) be caused. When Anselm's Principle is re-expressed in terms of essential kinds, the following emerges as one possible formulation of it: *For any essential kind of thing, if there is not, but possibly could be, something of that kind, it is possible for something of that kind to be caused*. Finally, given that we—unlike, perhaps, Anselm himself—are

ultimately interested in a proof of God's existence, I propose that we substitute references to *G* with references to the kind *divine being*. Following Anselm, we shall, of course, take *divine* to be itself an essential kind: any possible divine being is essentially so.

With all this in place, Anselm's "other argument" now emerges in one possible formulation as the following:

> For any essential kind of thing, if there is not, but possibly could be, something of that kind, then it is possible for something of that kind to be caused.
> There could possibly be something divine (i.e., of the essential kind *divine*).
> It is not possible for anything divine to be caused.[3]
> Therefore, something divine exists.

The argument is valid. If, as the second premise has it, it is possible for a divine being to exist, it follows from the first premise, when applied to the divine essential kind, that if no divine being actually exists, it is possible for a divine being to be caused. But the third premise tells us that this is not possible. So, a divine being does actually exist. What, however, of the truth of the argument's premises? The third premise states the generally accepted thesis that aseity essentially belongs to divinity. The second premise simply gives voice to a background assumption that we are accepting. Note that *necessarily existent* is not, as it was with the Modal Ontological Argument, being packed into a specification of what it is to be divine. All that is presupposed is a perfectly ordinary, traditional understanding of divinity as including aseity. To deny the second premise is tantamount to denying that God could possibly exist. As we know, some have argued for such an impossibility; but such people should not even be bothering to look at arguments such as the present one. Anselm's "other argument" is directed at the majority who believe that it is at least (non-epistemically) possible that a divine being should exist. Given this audience, Anselm's "other argument" should be regarded as sound if Anselm's Principle, expressed by the first premise, is accepted. Anselm's Principle thus emerges as our ultimate "crucial premise." For the remainder of this chapter we shall be concerned with it.

At first sight Anselm's Principle may seem to have very little to be said for it. Certainly most atheists who have their wits about them will deny it. Most atheists are willing to accept that aseity is an essential attribute of

God, or of any possible divine being. Necessarily, *if* a divine being existed, it could not possibly be caused to exist. And yet, they hold, no such being actually exists. This seems to be one clear counter-example to Anselm's Principle. So we need a good argument for this principle. William Rowe (1975: 51–3) proposes another counter-example. Surely, he claims, it is possible for an everlasting star to exist: a star that exists without beginning or end. But, he claims, it is not possible for an everlasting star to come into existence. And if it cannot come into existence, it cannot be caused. Nevertheless, such a star may not (and doubtless does not) actually exist. There are two weaknesses with this argument, of which at least the second is crippling. First, the claim that it is impossible for an everlasting star to begin to exist is ambiguous—as between a *de re* and a *de dicto* reading, as it is termed. Obviously, the following is not possible: there is an everlasting star that comes into existence. And yet, for all this, it may be possible that a star that is in fact everlasting should have come into existence. In other words, a star that is in fact everlasting might not have been.[4] In a footnote Rowe recognizes that there is this weakness in his argument, but says that he will not "pursue this matter further here." The only possible way to pursue it, however, would be to claim that it is possible that an *essentially* everlasting star is possible (though not actual). It is far from clear that this is a possibility at all.[5] Secondly, Rowe's argument is subject to the following objection. As we saw in the previous chapter, there is no reason to accept that it is a necessary truth that if something is caused, it has a beginning in time. Eternal (or sempiternal) causation is a coherent notion. Rowe's supposedly possible star will be relevant to our argument only if, in addition to existing without a beginning, it exists without a cause. It is significant that Rowe did not present his counter-example in this straightforward manner. Why did he not simply assert that it is possible for an uncaused star to exist? The reason, perhaps, is that this bald claim is far from being obviously true. Could there really have been a star that had no cause whatsoever?

What the case of Rowe illustrates is that the acceptability of Anselm's Principle hinges on the acceptability of some version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason. The reason why most people will find the claim that there could have been a star that simply had no cause implausible is that it conflicts with some version of this principle. James Ross and Todd Bates (2003: 206) have argued, however, that what is in effect Duns Scotus's version of Anselm's "other argument" does not presuppose, and does not need, any Principle of Sufficient Reason. I cannot see that this is true. They claim that what Scotus argues is that "what can exist *necessarily,* must do

so, whereas what is causable need not exist and might not have existed at all" (my emphasis). What Scotus actually asserted, however, as we have seen, is that if something can exist *a se,* it must actually exist *a se*. Ross and Bates seem to construe "can exist *a se*" as meaning or entailing "can exist necessarily." If the latter amounts to absolute necessity, the inference to an actual *a se* being would, of course, be secure.[6] Such a construal, however, saddles Scotus will all the dialectical problems that in Chapter 1 we saw attach to the Modal Ontological Argument. Moreover, in the brief and compressed passage that is the only place where Scotus attempts to justify what is in effect Anselm's Principle, he seems to appeal implicitly to some Principle of Sufficient Reason. Scotus argues that if something that does not actually exist *a se* could possibly exist *a se,* "then a non-being would make something exist, which is impossible; furthermore, it would cause itself, and thus not be entirely uncausable" (*De primo princ*. 3.19).[7] Be this as it may, I myself see no way at all of presenting a case for Anselm's Principle that does not rely on some Principle of Sufficient Reason. More positively, I shall argue, in what remains, that various versions of the Principle of Sufficient Reason do vindicate Anselm's Principle, and hence Anselm's "other argument."

I have just made reference to "various versions" of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (henceforth: PSR), since it can be, and has been, presented in various forms that differ in strength—some implying others and not conversely. The stronger the version of PSR one is willing to accept, the easier it will be to vindicate Anselm's Principle. Before turning to these substantially different varieties of PSR, however, for the sake of clarity it is perhaps worth mentioning a way in which different versions of PSR can differ in a merely verbal way. In connection with arguments for the existence of God, PSR is usually found in presentations of the Cosmological Argument. Consider the following argument:

> Everything that exists has a cause. Something exists. So it has a cause. So this cause has a cause. But an infinite series of causes and effects is impossible. Therefore, there is something that halts this regress, by causing other things and yet not being itself caused.

This is, of course, an appalling argument. Indeed, it is self-contradictory, since it both asserts that everything has a cause, and yet claims that there is something that is uncaused. No significant thinker has ever propounded such a version of the Cosmological Argument. I mention it simply because

it nicely indicates two ways in which a decent presentation of the argument can go. On the one hand, some significant proponents of the Cosmological Argument have indeed asserted, as a premise of the argument, that everything has a cause—including God, who, nevertheless stops the causal regress. Such a regress is stopped because advocates of this form of argument accept the notion of something being a cause of itself *(causa sui).* This phrase is most commonly associated with Spinoza; but the idea itself has a long history. We do not need to delve into this. It suffices that we be alert to the possibility that PSR can be presented as the claim that everything has a cause without this entailing an unstoppable regress of causes. This can be done by reformulating the above argument so that it makes a distinction between a kind of thing that has a cause distinct from itself and a kind of thing that is its own cause. A causal series consisting of things of the first kind, it would be held, must be terminated by something of the latter kind. On the other hand, many who endorse PSR work with a different notion of causality, according to which a cause must be distinct from its effect. Aquinas, for one, was most insistent upon this point. Many of those who adopt this second understanding of causality formulate PSR as the claim that everything has a *reason.* Sometimes the reason for a thing is not a cause of that thing, though a cause always constitutes a reason. When a reason for a thing is a cause, it is termed an "external reason"; otherwise the reason is an "internal reason."[8] The Cosmological Argument would then typically be formulated by arguing that a causal series (i.e., a series of things each member of which has an external reason for its being) must be terminated by something that has an internal reason for its being. As far as I can see, the these two approaches—the "cause" approach that recognizes a *causa sui,* and the "reason" approach that does not—are essentially equivalent. We need to adopt one rather than the other, however; and I propose to adopt the latter, "reason" approach.[9]

Let us now consider the ways in which formulations of PSR can differ in a substantive manner. There are, in fact, different dimensions of variation that cut across one another. First, PSRs can vary with respect to what we may call their status. A PSR can be presented as a contingent truth, as a necessary truth, or as a possible truth. Secondly, they may vary with respect to what we may call their scope. The principle with maximal scope applies to every entity, truth, and state of affairs. If something exists, there is a reason why it exists. If something is true, there is a reason why it is true. If some state of affairs obtains, there is a reason why it obtains.[10] Leibniz, the person with whom the phrase "principle of sufficient reason" is most

associated, explicitly enunciated it in this maximal form (e.g., *Monadol.* 32). With more moderate scope the principle states that for every individual thing that exists there is a reason why it exists. The weakest version of PSR in terms of scope is one that holds that for every event, there is a reason why it occurs. This is the way that the ancient adage *ex nihilo nihil fit* is commonly interpreted.[11]

A third dimension in which PSRs can vary concerns the nature of the reason that is demanded. The term "Principle of *Sufficient* Reason" can be, and has been, construed as implying that a reason is something that, when given, *necessitates* that for which it is a reason—since it suffices for it. In a domain where causality is the form of reason that is in play, this amounts to the doctrine of causal determinism. So construed, the principle has been denied for two reasons. The first is acceptance of a non-compatibilist or "libertarian" view of free will. The second is the development of the notion of (merely) *probabilistic causation.* Acceptance of neither of these, however, entails an outright rejection of PSR, but only a weakening of it in such a way that a reason need not be necessitating. Those who accept that certain intentional actions are free, and yet who hold that such freedom is incompatible with those acts being necessitated by some prior state of affairs, typically do not hold that such actions are performed for no reason. Such libertarians hold that a free act has a reason—a reason for the agent to perform the act, and a reason why the act is performed, when it is—but one that does not necessitate the performance of the action.[12] The term "sufficient" in the label "Principle of Sufficient Reason" should be interpreted as meaning only that the reason in question *suffices as a good explanation.* Again, to cite the cause of something is to give a reason, even if causation is interpreted probabilistically. Both of these grounds therefore suggest a version of PSR that is weaker than the necessitarian version. As we have in effect just seen, the reason that is demanded by this version of PSR may be nonnecessitating either by being a *rationalizing* reason or by being a *probabilifying* reason.

A final way in which PSRs can vary in strength is a matter of whether the principle is restricted to what we may call positive cases, or whether it is extended to cover negative cases as well. I exist; and so, according to at least one positive version of PSR, there is a reason why I exist. I do not have a sister. According to the corresponding negative version of the principle, there is a reason why I do not: a reason for the *nonexistence* of any sister. The extension of PSR to cover negative cases is perhaps principally associated with Spinoza, who was quite explicit on the matter: "To each thing

there must be assigned a cause or reason equally for why it exists as for why it does not exist. For example, if a triangle exists, a reason or cause must be given why it exists; but if it does not exist, a reason or cause must also be given that prevents it from existing or that takes its existence away" (*Ethics,* IP11 *aliter*).[13] Although he is more famous for the positive version of PSR, Leibniz (1948: 287–91) also endorsed the negative version. Anselm, too, as we have already in effect seen, endorsed it. If something does not exist, it is "able" not to exist. This, for Anselm, is the ascription of a doubly improper ability that is properly cashed out by reference to some actually existing being that has a power to prevent the first from existing. Since this thing's "ability" not to exist is being "exercised," the preventative power of the latter being is also being exercised. This will constitute the reason why the first does not exist.

One question that arises in connection with the negative version of PSR is whether the cited reason can itself be negative. Can one, for example, explain why an expected visitor is not here by saying that he did not catch his train? Few, I suppose, would deny this. The more interesting question is whether there can be a *complete* explanatory chain of absences and only absences explaining absences. We may call a negative version of PSR that allows this a "pure" negative version. It is quite clear that those who have expounded PSR in its negative version intend it to be understood as requiring that some *actual* entity or state of affairs be at least eventually cited as a reason for negative cases. This is implied by the passage from Spinoza, since what does not exist can hardly "prevent" something from existing or "take away" a thing's existence. Leibniz also intended the "impure" version of the negative principle, writing at one point that nonexistent possibles are excluded from existence by things that "include more perfection" or "involve more reality" (Leibniz 1948: 289). Anselm agrees. If something does not exist, some more powerful entity is actually exercising its power to prevent the first from existing.

In fact, a "pure" negative version of PRS is untenable. If the non-obtaining of a state of affairs is cited as the reason for the non-obtaining of some other state of affairs, the negative version of PSR will require a reason for the former as well as the latter. Either such an implied regress of negative reasons must terminate in some positive state of affairs, or it may terminate in a negative one.[14] If the former, the "pure" negative version is denied. The only way in which such a regress could be terminated "negatively," however, is by an initial absence that is self-explanatory, or for which there is an "internal reason." The only kind of negative state of affairs of this

kind, however, is one that is *intrinsically impossible*. But such a thing can explain or ground nothing—not even an absence (at least not a contingent one). The negative form of PSR that we are to concern ourselves with, therefore, is the meatier version that requires negative states of affairs to be explained, eventually, in terms of positive states of affairs.

In my experience, many who are not unsympathetic to PSR in its more familiar positive version are surprised and wary when the negative version is proposed. It may therefore be worth saying a few more words about it immediately. Indeed, doing so will perhaps help to make the proposal itself somewhat clearer. A fairly intuitive reservation about the negative version of PSR is the following. If something exists, there is perhaps some demand we feel for an explanation of this fact. But if *nothing* (or nothing of a certain sort) exists, what is there to demand? To put the reservation in a perhaps suggestive way: nothing requires no explanation or ground. In fact, however, it is not of a sheer nothing that an explanation is demanded, but of why something that is *possible* is not the case. Moreover, it is worth noting that a moderately strong positive version of PSR itself virtually contains the negative version for the vast majority of cases. As Leibniz often emphasized, not all possibles are compossible: that is, the existence of certain things excludes the existence of certain otherwise possible things. So giving a reason why certain possible beings are actual itself constitutes a reason why all the things that are not compossible with them fail to exist. Consider, for example, the possibility that I should have had a sister. If such a sister of mine had existed, the world would have been different in an incalculably large number of ways. Certain matter would have gone to make up her body at a certain time *rather than* being matter that made up certain things that are actual. A certain human egg would have developed into a certain human individual rather than, as was actually the case, persisting as an egg for a longer time and then decomposing into more elementary organic bodies. These last would simply not exist in one scenario in which I have a sister. Given a certain positive version of PSR, there is a reason for the existence of these elementary bodies: a reason why the egg decomposed rather than generating a human individual. This by itself provides the reason why the possible human individual in question did not actually come into existence. As Spinoza *(loc. cit.)* put it, nonexistence is accounted for in such cases by *the order of nature*. The extent to which the positive version of PSR virtually contains the negative version depends on the extent to which actual things exclude otherwise possible things. In fact the exclusion is mas-

sive. When we consider some possible but non-actual entity, and then suppose that it is "plugged into" our actual world, the consequences of this will be incalculably great. At the very least it will have some consequence. So, if any such thing were introduced into our world, things would go differently in some respect. If, however, as moderate and weak positive versions of PSR have it, there is a reason why things are the way they are, this by itself constitutes a reason why the otherwise possible object is not actual. The causal influence that such a being would have, if actual, is incompatible with the way things actually go—for which there is a sufficient reason.

It is, however, not the case that the positive version of PSR simply entails or implicitly contains the negative version. This is perhaps most readily seen by considering the non-contingent versions of the two. If the positive version entailed the negative version, the necessitated form of the former would entail the necessitated form of the latter, but it does not, since the necessitated negative version of PSR rules out something that the necessitated positive version does not: namely, the "empty" possible world. Might there have been absolutely nothing at all—not even God? The necessitated negative version of PSR rules this out: for what could possibly be the reason for this negative state of affairs? The positive version of PSR, even in its necessitated form, has, however, absolutely nothing to say against this possibility. Nevertheless, although the positive version of PSR does not wholly sustain the negative version, I hope I have said enough to convince the reader that the negative version of PSR is not the strange and unwonted version of the principle that it may at first appear.

There are, then, four distinct dimensions in which versions of PSR can vary in strength. In general, the stronger the version of PSR that is adopted, the easier it will be to justify Anselm's Principle and to vindicate Anselm's "other argument." In order truly to vindicate the argument, I would have to present a convincing case for accepting (at least one of) the various versions of PSR that suffice to sustain it. That, however, is too big an undertaking for the present occasion.[15] Indeed, I am unsure that it is possible to convince someone who does not accept any version of PSR by any set argument. So intellectually fundamental is the issue of whether one accepts PSR or not, that changing one's view on this matter will involve a massive reconfiguration of philosophical commitments—indeed, of "world view." What I propose, therefore, is simply to examine how Anselm's "other argument" can be sustained *if* various forms of PSR are accepted—and, in particular, to

search for the weakest form of PSR that is up to this task. As we shall discover, a very weak form indeed suffices: a form that is so weak that few will be inclined to deny it.

Let us begin with PSR in its familiar positive version. A number of writers have argued that the positive version of PSR with maximal scope—applying, that is to say, to everything that exists, obtains, or is true—is incoherent.[16] We do not need to embark on an investigation of this issue, however, since this version of PSR is far stronger than is necessary to vindicate Anselm's Principle. On the other hand, the weakest version in terms of scope—that which applies only to events—has no application to the present argument, since God does not possibly come into existence. What is required is PSR as it applies to the existence of *individuals*.[17] From now on, whenever I refer to "things" or "entities" it is to such individuals that reference is being made. The moderately strong version of PSR we are to start with, therefore, is the principle that for every existent individual, there is a reason why it exists. So construed, PSR will not allow us to vindicate Anselm's "other argument," if the principle is taken as being merely contingently true. This is because Anselm's Principle—*for any essential kind of thing, if there is not, but possibly could be, something of that kind, then it is possible for something of that kind to be caused*—concerns kinds of thing that have no actual instance. A thesis to the effect that every *existent* individual has a reason for its existence hardly bears upon this Principle. The Principle can, however, be vindicated if this version of PSR is held to be a necessary truth. Although many readers may feel that this is a very strong, indeed implausibly strong, version of the principle, I might point out that the major traditional advocates of PSR have regarded it as being more than contingently true. This is certainly true of Leibniz, with whom the principle is most commonly associated.[18] It is equally true of Anselm, who claimed not only that "nothing exists through nothing," but that "it *cannot even be conceived* that something should exist not through something" (M 3). Even David Hume seems to have held PRS in this strong form. This may surprise some readers, since Hume is the historical figure commonly appealed to by those who would doubt even the bare truth of PSR. That Hume had no such doubts is made clear by the following forthright assertion contained in a letter he wrote to John Stewart in February 1754: "Allow me to tell you that I never asserted so absurd a proposition as that anything might arise without a cause" (Hume 1932: I,

185). Not only does Hume here clearly express his allegiance to a certain form of PSR, his characterization of a denial of it as "absurd" seems to indicate that he held the truth of PSR to be more than a bare matter of fact. Indeed, there is at least a question of whether holding PSR in its contingent form counts as really endorsing PSR at all. If one adopted a "Humean" account of causality (an account that Hume himself almost certainly did not hold), according to which causality is ultimately just a matter of constant conjunction, or brute uniformities, it will be easy, perhaps natural, to hold that if some version of PSR is true, it is merely contingently true.[19] There are, it may be allowed, suitable uniformities in our world; but they might (easily?) not have held. Traditionally, however, PSR has meant much more than this. To claim that something has a "reason" is to claim that it has an *ontological ground*. To say that instances of one sort of thing are, as a matter of brute fact, universally correlated with instances of another sort of thing, hardly amounts to that. The less one is a "Humean" about causality, the more difficult it is to hold PSR in a merely contingent form.[20] As I have said above, I am not attempting to convince anyone of the truth of a non-contingent (or any) version of PSR. I simply wish to note that PSR's non-contingent version is not the extreme and unusual form of the principle that it may at first appear.

Before proceeding, however, I wish to consider a straightforward argument against the tenability of a non-contingent form of PSR, since it may be thought to be decisive—especially for those who *accept* the conclusion of Anselm's "other argument." For could not God have created a chaotic universe? Some may perhaps deny this; but let us accept the possibility, at least for the sake of argument. Even if this is possible, it does not follow that there is a possible world in which PSR fails to hold. This would follow if being a chaotic world implied being a world in which PSR fails to hold; but in fact it does not imply this. The first thing to note is that the term "world" is ambiguous when applied to the scenario in question. The "possible world" we are considering is a world "containing" God. When, however, it is said that in this scenario God creates a chaotic "world," the latter is less than the former, in that it does not, of course, include God. God does not create Himself. Nevertheless, it may be said, if all the non-divine sector of this possible world is chaotic, surely PSR does fail to hold. How is *any* chaos compatible with PSR? What must be borne in mind, however, is that it has been stipulated that God *created* this chaotic world. The traditional understanding of God relates the doctrine of creation not only to the doctrine of "preservation"—God at every moment sustains in being everything that

exists—but to the doctrine of "general concurrence"—God is immediately active in the causal activity of created causal agents. As Aquinas nicely put it, "the operations of nature are attributed to God as operating in nature" (ST, Ia, q. 105, a. 5). The view that God's role in relation to the world is, apart from miraculous intervention, confined to creating and preserving it was hardly held in the Middle Ages.[21] Indeed, some in the medieval period—most notably the Muslim Mutakallimun—embraced an extreme occasionalism that denied all causal efficacy to the natural world.[22] In the Latin West this was not the majority view, of course. Like Aquinas (e.g., *SCG,* III, c.69), most held that God created things possessing their own genuine causal powers. Nevertheless, these causal powers are only ever effective because God is immediately involved, not merely in preserving the agents and these powers, but in rendering them effective. As Aquinas put it, God "applies them to acting" (ST, Ia, q. 105, a. 5). Elsewhere he writes that "the power of everything else acts by His power" (*De pot.,* q. 3, a. 7).[23] It is because of this that natural causal agents were regarded as "secondary causes," dependent for their efficacy on the primary causal activity of God. From this perspective, when we consider the possible world in which God creates a chaos, what we are considering is a world in which there is no *secondary* causality. What we are therefore considering is something like the world of the occasionalists—albeit a world in which there is no regularity on the basis of which anything could be regarded as the "occasion" for anything else. It is like occasionalism in so far as God is the immediate, sole, and sufficient cause of everything that happens. But PSR does not fail to hold in such a world. Everything that occurs in the chaotic world and everything (other than God) that exists in it have their "sufficient reason" in God's causal activity. One could, of course, simply affirm that it is possible for God to create a chaotic world that was, after creation at least, free of divine causality. Most traditional religious figures would, however, have regarded this as repugnant to their conception of God. Obviously, much more can be said on this issue. At present I wish merely to point out that an appeal to God in the above manner is not a straightforward way of ruling out the necessitated version of PSR.

If we assume the non-contingent positive version of PSR with moderate scope, we can defend Anselm's "other argument" as follows. It is granted that it is possible for a divine being to exist. So, consider the possible situation in which one does. Given the present non-contingent version of PSR, there is a reason for its existence in this possible situation. Given divine aseity, this cannot be an external reason. This is true whether we regard the

reason in question as necessitating or as nonnecessitating, since an *a se* being is *totally* ontologically independent. The reason for the divine being's existence in this possible situation must be, therefore, an internal reason. This divine being must, in other words, *itself* provide the reason why it exists. What sort of internal reason could this be? The only options, as we have seen, are a rationalizing, a probabilifying, and a necessitating reason. The first is obviously inapplicable, since the suggestion would then be that the divine being exists in the possible world in which it does because it intentionally acts in such a way that it exists, or that it "wills" itself to exist. Perhaps it does; but this can hardly be the reason or ground of its very existence, since it must exist in order to intend or will anything. The internal reason must, therefore, be located not in anything that this possible divine being *does*, but in what it *is:* it must be located in the divine essence itself. The divine essence, in other words, must itself constitute the ground or reason why it is exemplified.

We are justified in focusing specifically on the possible divine being's essence, rather than on any attribute or characteristic that it may have, for a number of reasons. First, God has traditionally been taken to be absolutely simple. God does not "possess" any attributes that are distinct from His very essence. Anselm himself certainly subscribed to this view (M 25). The notion of such absolute simplicity has, however, come in for considerable criticism of late, even by theists; so one should perhaps not rely on it without further argument. Secondly, however, if one does suppose God to exhibit the subject-attribute structure, divine attributes will be ontologically dependent on the divine subject, and so they can hardly ground the very existence of that subject.[24] More precisely, some attributes are *per se* in that they flow from, or are (solely) grounded in and necessitated by, the essence of the subject; and some are not, but are "accidental."[25] God possesses no accidental attributes, however. For since such attributes would not be grounded solely in God's nature, He would possess one only in virtue of something else causing Him to have it. But that conflicts with divine aseity. At least this is true if we confine our attention to what we may call "intrinsic" attributes. If God exists, He doubtless has the attribute of being the creator of a world in which someone is now talking. That He possesses such an attribute is based in part on the contingent activity of some being distinct from Himself; and yet there is no causal influence on God. Such extrinsic attributes are, however, hardly candidates for providing a reason for God's existence.[26] That leaves us with *per se* attributes. They, however, are themselves grounded in the divine essence, and so cannot provide a reason

why the divine essence is realized. It is, rather, that providing a reason for the latter would itself constitute an explanation of the realization of the former. Finally, if one is suspicious of this ontology of *per se* attributes being grounded in essences, the only remaining possibility is to view the attribute that supposedly provides the reason why God exists as itself a *constituent* of the divine essence. A single constituent of an essence can provide a reason why the whole essence is realized, however, only if it provides a reason for the realization of each other constituent of the essence.[27] Since a constituent of an essence is a *necessary* constituent—for without it the essence would not be the essence it is—this last proposal actually implies the conclusion for which I have been arguing: namely, that it is the divine essence that constitutes the reason why God exists in the possible situation in which He does—since the essence will constitute such a reason in virtue of one of its essential constituents. In fact, this last proposal is not a sensible one to adopt. As I said above, the doctrine of divine simplicity is doubted by many today. If, however, it is dropped, one had better replace it with the following simulacrum: that the essential divine attributes are all mutually entailing. If not even this is maintained, not only would the resultant conception of God be radically different from the traditional one, it would not even be compatible with the "factual necessity" of God. The primary reason why the tradition endorsed the doctrine of absolute simplicity was to exclude the possibility of God ceasing to exist. Whatever is in any way complex, the thought went, could be broken up. If the divine attributes are regarded as really distinct, but not as mutually entailing, God could lose one of them, and thereby cease to be God. If, however, the divine attributes are mutually entailing, there is no basis for singling out one of them as providing "the" reason why the essence as a whole is realized. So, however one looks at the matter, it is the divine essence as such that is the relevant reason why a divine being exists in the possible situation in which one does.

One cannot suppose that the divine nature grounds the divine existence by *probabilifying* it, for that makes no sense—at least to me. It is to suppose that a certain nature is such that there is a sufficiently high intrinsic or a priori probability of that nature being exemplified. Perhaps we can make sense of certain natures being more probably exemplified than others. Perhaps it is the case that simpler natures have an intrinsically higher probability of existence than complex ones: that, for example, there is a higher intrinsic probability of hydrogen atoms existing than of living organisms. In order, however, to provide an intrinsic reason why something

of a certain sort exists, we surely need a high probability: at least higher than chance.[28] It would hardly be an explanation of why the hydrogen nature is realized to say that the probability of its being realized is fifty-fifty. But it is precisely the idea that it is, a priori and absolutely speaking, *more probable than not* (though less than necessary) that a certain nature be realized, that I find unintelligible.

If it is right that this last notion is indeed nonsensical, there is only one sort of reason left that can be the reason why a divine being exists in the possible situation in which one does: an internal necessitating reason.[29] The divine nature is exemplified in the possible world in question because it *must be*. The necessity in question here is *absolute* necessity. It is not as if a divine being exists in the possible world in question because of anything that is special about that world. A divine being does not exist, when it does, because of anything other than its own nature. There are, for example, no laws holding in the world in question in virtue of which a divine being exists of "causal necessity." A divine being is bound by no laws, for that would conflict with its absolute ontological independence. Nor is it the case that the necessity of the divine existence in the possible world in question has implications only for a restricted set of possible worlds that are "closest" to the given world, in the sense of the semantics of counterfactuals. How would those worlds relevantly differ from the original one? *Nothing* is relevant to the necessity of a divine being's existence in the worlds in question save the divine essence itself. If, however, the necessity with which a divine being exists in the possible world in which it does is absolute, then this divine being actually exists.[30] Moreover, since divinity is an essential "attribute," this possible divine being exists in the actual world *as divine*. And it also, of course, exists necessarily.[31]

I regard what I have just run through as an explication of the traditional idea that God's *essence involves existence*. This perhaps initially puzzling notion is best understood as the idea that a certain essence or nature cannot possibly not be realized: cannot fail to be realized in any metaphysically possible world. So understood, the notion is not only coherent, but forced on us if two things are granted. First, a non-contingent version PSR, according to which metaphysically possible worlds are those in which PSR holds. Second, the metaphysical possibility of the realization of a certain *a se* essence—an essence, that is to say, the realization of which cannot possibly be explained by or grounded on any external reason.

I have shown how a certain version of PSR vindicates Anselm's "other argument." In case it is not obvious, let me briefly indicate how this version

vindicates Anselm's Principle. This, in one of its possible formulations, is the principle that *for any essential kind of thing, if there is not, but possibly could be, something of that kind, then it is possible for something of that kind to be caused*. Suppose there is no actual instance of such a kind, but that there could be. Consider some such possible exemplar. Given the version of PSR now in play, there is in the possible world in question a reason for the existence of this thing. This reason is either an internal reason or an external reason. It cannot, however, be an internal reason, because the only sort of internal reason that makes sense is an internal *absolutely necessitating* reason; and if this were the reason, this (and hence some) instance of the essential kind in question would *actually* exist—which, *ex hypothesi,* is not the case. So, each possible instance of an actually uninstantiated essential kind has an *external* reason for its existence. But this means that each such possible instance is caused. Hence, it is possible for something of the kind in question to be caused—just as Anselm's Principle has it.

The preceding argument bears some resemblance to the Modal Ontological Argument. Indeed, given one proviso, the preceding argument is sound if and only if the Modal Ontological Argument is sound. The proviso is that possible worlds are restricted to those in which PSR holds. When I discussed the Modal Ontological Argument and criticized it, I did not claim that the argument was unsound. I suggested that it was dialectically weak. Purveyors of the argument give us no reason to accept that, necessarily, if God exists, He exists necessarily. The necessitated version of PSR, and hence the restriction of possible worlds to those in which this principle holds, gives us a reason to accept it.[32] At the end of the previous chapter I stated that although Norman Malcolm and Charles Hartshorne are commonly discussed in relation to a neat "logical" presentation of the Modal Ontological Argument, Malcolm gestures towards the deep metaphysical issues that lie behind it, and Hartshorne explores them at length. Let me cite Hartshorne one final time, because in one passage he in effect adumbrates the above vindication of Anselm's "other argument":

> On anything like the classical view, God is ungenerated, and such that his existence could not in any intelligible sense be caused. So we have the notion of an uncaused yet by hypothesis contingent reality. Its existence is held to be possible. . . . Suppose it exists: what could explain this existence? Absolutely nothing; all possible explanations have been ruled out. . . . Simply it is so; it might not have been so, but there is nothing in which to ground either possibility, and no way in which to

> describe the selection between the two alternatives held to be equally possible. It is as though there had been an eternal throw of the dice, but what dice? No other usual doctrine flouts the principle of sufficient reason as radically as this one! (Hartshorne: 1967: 296)

Some will find the necessitated version of PSR too strong to be acceptable. Let us see how Anselm's argument fares with what is perhaps a weaker version: the negative version. It is, in fact, perhaps not clear that this version of PSR is weaker than the previous one. As we have seen, although the positive version implicitly contains the negative version for the vast majority of cases, it does not entail it. On the other hand, if a negative version of PSR is accepted, it does not have to be necessitated in order to sustain Anselm's argument: that there is a reason for the nonexistence of whatever *actually* does not exist will suffice. Whether or not this version is weaker than the previous one, let us consider the argument in the light of it.

Suppose that God does not exist: that is, that no divine being exists. According to the negative version of PSR, there is a reason why no such being exists: something that accounts for this negative fact. But what could it possibly be? We are granting that it is at least possible that a divine being should exist. So the reason why there is no divine being is not that the existence of such a being is intrinsically impossible. As before, the suggestion that the reason is an internal rationalizing reason is a non-starter. What about the suggestion that it may be an internal probabilfying reason? I stated above that I find little sense in the idea that a realization of an essential nature is a priori more probable than not. I find no more sense in the idea that the realization of any such nature (given that it is at least possible) is *less* probable than not—which is what the present suggestion boils down to. Is it *intrinsically* improbable that a divine being should exist (assuming that it is at least possible)? I should be astonished by anyone who ventured a judgment on this matter—assuming that we can even make sense of this.[33] The reason in question, therefore, cannot be an internal reason at all. The reason, if there is one, must be external. But a divine being is essentially *a se*. So, nothing could have prevented a divine being from existing, or in any other way explain why one does not exist. Not only could nothing necessitate or infallibly ensure the nonexistence of a divine being, nothing could possibly contribute to or increase the probability of it, since this would conflict with the *absolute* independence that is aseity (or "factual

necessity"). In the absence of any possible reason, either internal or external, for a divine being's nonexistence, the negative version of PSR demands that we conclude that a divine being (indeed, every possible divine being) does exist.[34]

It has been objected by Richard Gale (1991: 229), in effect, that the foregoing argument is unconvincing, because, although God cannot be prevented from existing by anything, there are possible things with which God's existence is incompatible. Gale offers unjustifiable evil as an instance. Perhaps there is a possible world—perhaps it is *ours*—that contains such evil. If there is, Gale claims, the existence of such evil in that world rules out God's existing in that world, quite compatibly with God being essentially *a se*. Not all incompatibilities are causal incompatibilities. In fact, however, such an incompatibility as this one of Gale's invokes is less than the negative version PSR requires. PSR, in any of its versions, is a principle of *explanation* or ontological *grounding*. The existence of unjustifiable evil would not explain why God does not exist, or be the ground of His nonexistence. The direction of explanation would be quite the reverse. It would be because God did not exist that there was unjustifiable evil. And things are not mutually explaining. We would, therefore, return to the question of why God fails to exist.

I have just argued that a second version of PSR vindicates Anselm's "other argument." Let us see how it specifically vindicates Anselm's Principle. If a certain (essential) kind of thing does not exist, this Principle states, it is possible for something of that kind to be caused, if such a thing is possible at all. Suppose, then, that nothing of some such kind actually exists. The negative version of PSR tells us that there is a reason why this is so. This cannot, for the reasons we have seen, be an internal reason. So it is some external reason: something's causal action explains why such a kind of thing does not exist.[35] But if this is so, the *absence* of such a causal impediment, or the operation of some causal agent that is freed by the lifting of the impediment, will, other things being equal, contribute to the causal explanation of why something of the kind in question does exist, when it does. Such an explanation is at least possible. So, some possible instance of the kind in question is causable. What this indicates is that the negative version of PSR sustains a weak, positive version.[36] The only kinds of thing that can be caused not to exist are the kinds of thing that can be caused to exist.

Finally—and this is, perhaps, the most "philosophically" interesting part of the present work—there is an extremely weak version of PSR that suffices to

sustain Anselm's argument. For suppose that all versions of PSR are false. Perhaps there is something in existence that simply has no explanation or ontological ground at all. Still, is it not at least *possible* that some such thing should have an explanation?[37] Suppose an entity of a certain essential kind just pops into existence. Perhaps, for reasons having to do with the necessity of origin, this very thing could not have been brought into existence in a causally explanatory way. But surely some possible exemplar of this kind could have. To deny that this is possible would be a very strong claim indeed—and one for which I can see no justification. It would be to claim that there is an essential kind that can possibly be instantiated, but that there is *necessarily* no explanation of any *possible* instance of the kind. Most people, I think, would be unwilling to go this far.[38] The argument that is to follow is for this majority. If you do not accept even this weak "possibilist" version of PSR, there is no way of making Anselm's "other argument" persuasive for you.

It is perhaps worth noting that this extremely weak version of PSR may have been in Anselm's own mind when he propounded the argument that, as I suggested in the previous chapter, most clearly indicates his metaphysical perspective. That argument runs in part as follows: "That than which a greater cannot be conceived cannot be conceived to exist except without a beginning. But whatever can be conceived to exist and does not exist can be conceived to exist with a beginning" (R 1). The second sentence here is not exactly ambiguous, but there are two different views that it can be taken as expressing. Anselm might have been claiming that any conceivable nonexistent can be conceived to have a beginning because he thought that any such thing, if it did exist, *would* (necessarily) have a beginning. Anselm certainly was of this opinion. We have already noted his assertion that "it cannot even be conceived that something should exist not through something" (M 3). Only the "supreme essence," Anselm goes on to say, can exist through itself. So, nothing else is conceivable except as existing through something else (i.e., as caused). But, according to Anselm, it is a conceptual truth that whatever is caused begins to exist. So, everything that does not exist (and, hence, that is not God, or the supreme essence) cannot even be conceived as existing except as with a beginning of its existence. Things that do not exist are the kinds of things that *must* have a beginning in the possible situation in which they do exist. By dropping the necessary connection that Anselm makes between being caused and beginning to exist we arrived at Anselm's Principle: if something can be conceived to exist but does not exist, it can be conceived to be caused. This, too, can be seen as reflecting the above views of Anselm. So, this Principle can be seen as

expressing the view that a nonexistent can be *conceived* to be caused simply because it can be *conceived* to exist, and because the existence of anything except God (or *G,* or the supreme essence) is inconceivable *except as caused.* The Principle, when thus interpreted and fed into Anselm's "other argument," will correspond to the first defence of that argument above: the one that relied on the necessitated positive version of PSR. The argument from *Reply I* can, however, be read as expressing a weaker metaphysical thesis. Whether or not a thing that does not exist *must* have a beginning when it exists, it can at least be *conceived* to have a beginning.[39] One indication that this weaker view may also have been in Anselm's mind is a passage where he states that if something can be conceived not to exist, it can be conceived to have a beginning *and an end* (R 3). It is clear that Anselm did not think that anything that fails to exist (and so can be conceived not to exist) necessarily would have an end if it should exist. As we have seen, Anselm was of the opinion that angels and human souls have no end, though he also thought that God could have created more of them than He did. Anselm seems, therefore, to have been of the view that anything that does not exist, but that can be conceived to exist, can be conceived to have an end *whether or not it must have.* Perhaps this extends to having a beginning. If so, then since, according to Anselm, nothing can be conceived as having a beginning without being caused, Anselm may well have held that anything that does not exist, but that can be conceived to exist, can be conceived to be caused *whether or not it must be.* This would correspond to the present defence of Anselm's "other argument" on the basis of a merely "possibilist" version of PSR. Be this as it may, a merely possibilist version is certainly sufficient to vindicate Anselm's Principle and Anselm's "other argument," as we shall now see.

The possibilist version of PSR that is now in play is the following: For every essential kind of thing that can possibly have an instance, it is possible that an instance of that kind should have a reason for its existence. If it is allowed that a divine being could possibly exist, it follows that it is possible that such a being should exist and that there be a reason for its existence. Perhaps it is possible for some instance of this kind to exist for no reason at all. Let it be so, for that is now irrelevant. Consider a possible world in which a divine being exists, and does so for a reason. As before, this cannot be any external reason, since this would conflict with divine aseity. Indeed, as before, the only possible reason is a necessitating internal reason. And, as before, this entails that a divine being actually exists.[40] The vindication of Anselm's Principle is again straightforward. Suppose that

there is actually nothing of a certain essential kind, though there might have been. The possibilist version of PSR tells us that some possible instance of the kind exists for a reason. That reason cannot, however, be an internal necessitating reason, for then there would actually be an instance of the kind. Since no other sort of internal reason makes sense, the reason must be an external reason or cause.

As I have mentioned, Anselm's "other argument" is to be found not only, implicitly, in Anselm, but also explicitly, though briefly, in Duns Scotus. James Ross and Michael Loux have presented arguments for God's existence that draw directly on Scotus. Moreover, their arguments are in essence similar to the last argument I have just presented. Both, however, rely on a version of PSR according to which any possible *contingent* being possibly has a cause or external reason.[41] This is somewhat different from the principle I have relied on above. My own applies to *everything* (within its scope: i.e., individuals); the former is restricted to contingent existents. Although my possibilist version of PSR entails the version adopted by Ross and Loux, I believe that their versions produce an argument that is dialectically weaker. This is because someone could bring forward the case of God (or a divine being) as a counter-example to their versions. I take it that the majority of atheists who allow at least the logical possibility of a divine being accept that, if God existed, he would be *a se*. But since they believe that God does not actually exist, they hold His existence (and nonexistence) to be contingent. In formulating PSR as they do, Ross and Loux simply deny this position without any supporting consideration.[42] The possibilist version of PSR I have adopted is wholly general in its application (given its scope). The claim that for *any* possibly instantiated essential kind, it is at least possible that there should be an instance of that kind that exists for a reason has, I believe, considerable intuitive plausibility. Of course, when one sees where acceptance of this principle leads, one may re-think it. But that is another matter, since that is an issue that always arises when a valid argument has a conclusion that is surprising in relation to premises one has accepted.

I conclude this assessment of Anselm's "other argument," and this book, with a consideration of a type of objection that is repeatedly made against versions of the ontological argument: the Gaunilo-style objection, which attempts a *reductio ad absurdum* of the argument.[43] Whether or not Anselm's "other argument" properly counts as a version of the ontological argument

(a question I regard as of no importance), it may seem that it is indeed open to this type of objection. In a nutshell: does not Anselm's argument prove too much? The arguments we have been considering prove the existence of a divine being, given one or another version of PSR, solely on the grounds of aseity. So if they work, it will be possible, by analogous arguments, to prove the existence of any and every possible *a se* being. But will there not be too many of them to be credible? More decisively, will not some of them be absolutely incompatible with one another? Either way, we shall have reduced the argument to one degree or another of absurdity.

This problem is best considered as arising in two forms. First, will the argument not demonstrate the existence of a plurality of divine beings? Second, will it not prove the existence of who knows how many non-divine kinds of *a se* beings? As to the former: there are arguments aplenty to the effect that there could be at most one divine being. If at least one of these arguments works, as Anselm certainly believed, the bearing of this on Anselm's "other argument" is clear: when we consider all the essentially different, supposedly possible *a se* divine natures that we might postulate, only one of them is in fact metaphysically possible.[44] If there is no cogent argument against the possibility of there being more than one divine being, the fact that Anselm's argument may prove such a plurality is in and of itself not absurd.[45] At least no philosophical absurdity would attach to the position. It may well be thought, however, intolerable on religious grounds—in which case one must hold to the former view that only one divine nature is so much as possible. This is far from being an "absurd" position. In fact I believe it is true.[46]

It is the second form of the Gaunilo-style objection that may seem more challenging: namely, that the argument proves the existence of a plethora of non-divine *a se* beings. This problem may be thought to be particularly acute, because it may be thought that any such being would be incompatible with God's existence—if it is an essential attribute of God that He creates and holds sway over everything else there might be (as Anselm held). There would be such an incompatibility, because Anselm's "other argument" would apply *directly* to these other possible *a se* beings, establishing their existence independently of any reference to God. This very fact, however, indicates what a defender of Anselm must say at this point: namely, that no *a se* being other than a divine being is so much as possible.[47] Moreover, there is an explanation (independent of Anselm's argument) of why no other *a se* being is possible if a divine being is possible, whereas there is

none that goes in the other direction. Consider any of the less obviously implausible non-divine candidates for being *a se:* energy, for example, or what "preceded" the Big Bang. A divine being, because it would be omnipotent, could create any such thing. So no such (essential kind of) thing is essentially *a se,* if a divine being is possible. Conversely, the possible existence of, say, *a se* energy in no way *explains* why no divine being is possible: it is merely logically incompatible with it (if the thinking behind Anselm's other argument is solid). Nevertheless, it may seem unclear how decisive this point is. We may seem to have little more than a standoff here. Is God the only possible *a se* being, or is there at least one other possible *a se* being? How could we possibly answer this question?

There are, in fact, resources in the tradition that allow one to do just this. I sketch just one.[48] Consider Aquinas's "Five Ways" and what follows them in the *Summa Theologiae*. The second of the "ways" argues to the existence of a first efficient cause (an *a se* being, in effect). Having proved to his own satisfaction the existence of such a thing, Aquinas concludes by writing, "And this all understand to be God" (ST Ia, q. 2, a. 3). His first and third "ways," which, respectively, prove the existence of an unmoved mover and a *per se* necessary being, end similarly. Aquinas has come in for much criticism for this swift final step in his arguments. The Five Ways are, however, immediately followed by a string of "Questions" and "Articles" in which Aquinas attempts to demonstrate that the core divine attributes such as absolute goodness, infinity, eternity, and simplicity are implied by the attributes dealt with in the "ways." What is relevant for us is that one of these ways, as I have just mentioned, deals with aseity. In other words, the "Thomist" reply to the Gaunilo-style argument is that there are no possible non-divine *a se* beings, because aseity entails divinity. I conclude with a brief indication of how the tradition would typically have argued for such an entailment.

Something is *a se* only if it is simple, eternal (or at least sempiternal), and infinite. Necessarily, such a being is the ontological ground of anything else that may happen to exist; and necessarily it is unique. The only possible such being is an immaterial being. The only possible immaterial being is an intellectual being. An infinite intellectual being is active, omniscient, omnipotent, and absolutely good. And this all understand to be God. Almost every move in this chain of inferences will, of course, be regarded as dubious, if not downright incomprehensible, by many today—so far have we resiled from the traditional understanding of these matters. In

fact, I regard these issues as the most interesting and intellectually challenging of all in the whole domain of the "Philosophy of Religion," in so far as this is taken to have a metaphysical dimension. On another occasion I hope to explore them in depth. The traditional view has much, I believe, to be said for it. For now, it suffices to say that the Gaunilo-style "it-proves-too-much" objection is far from being the decisive objection to Anselm's "other argument" that it may initially seem.

APPENDICES

In the first Appendix I justify my claim in the Introduction that the usual criticisms of the "traditional" Ontological Argument are less than conclusive. In Appendixes C to F I provide formal proofs of the Modal Ontological Argument discussed in Chapter 1. There are four versions, because the basic argument is presented both at the level of the Propositional Calculus and at the level of the Predicate Calculus; and because each proof is presented in both S5 and B. These are preceded in Appendix B by a brief sketch of the formal system I employ. The final Appendix deals with certain issues that are raised by an argument that is discussed in Chapter 4.

Appendix A

In the Introduction I stated that none of the familiar refutations of the "traditional" Ontological Argument is conclusive. I here offer a brief justification for this claim.

Thomas Aquinas (as usually interpreted) objected to the argument on the grounds that it presupposes a knowledge of the divine essence that we in fact (indeed necessarily, at least in our "status" as *viatores*) lack.[1] Anselm, however, repeatedly denies that we have the kind of insight into the divine essence that Aquinas supposes Anselm's argument to require (e.g., P 1, 15–17); and he is not being inconsistent.[2] Kant is commonly supposed to have completely undermined Anselm's argument by pointing out that existence is not a real predicate. In fact, Anselm's argument itself requires that existence *not* be a real predicate in Kant's sense. When Kant claimed that existence is a not a "real" predicate, he was using a technical term. He was not saying that existence is not really a predicate. According to Kant, it is: it is a "logical" predicate. The application of a "real" predicate to a subject constitutes a "determination" *(Bestimmung)* of the subject—by which, Kant makes clear, he means a determination of the content of the concept of the subject of the proposition. Crucially, Kant explains such determination as being a matter of *adding to* and *enlarging* this concept (*KrV* A598/B626).[3] When, however, we turn to Anselm's argument, we see that Anselm requires that real, extra-mental existence in no way change or enlarge the concept of *something than which a greater cannot be conceived.* What Anselm claims is that when we think of something than which a greater cannot be conceived, we can conceive *that very thing* existing in reality as well as in our understanding. It is exactly the same intentional object that can be considered as existing in the understanding and also conceived as existing in reality. If conceiving the latter in any way altered or enlarged the content of the concept, or the intentional object, what Anselm claims to be possible would be wholly impossible.[4]

The unadorned claim that existence is not a predicate at all was something of a slogan in mid-twentieth-century analytical philosophy. It derives in large part from the work of Bertrand Russell. Although he himself hardly ever makes the claim in so many words, on occasion he does: "Existence, in fact, quite definitely is not a predicate" (Russell 1964: 171). The criticism of the Ontological Argument that is erected on this basis has, perhaps, even less to be said for it than that based on Kant—since the claim itself is false. Of course existence is a predicate![5] What else could it be in

sentences such as "England exists" and "Anselm existed"? It was agreed by proponents of the thesis that at the level of surface grammar existence indeed functions as a predicate. The idea was, as William Kneale (1936: 154) states the matter, that existence is not (or, as he put it, does not stand for) a predicate "in the logical sense." The surface grammar of sentences in natural language commonly misleads as to the true "logical form" of the propositions expressed by these sentences. The logical form of "existential" sentences is, it was held, *quantificational* in nature. To say that cats exist is to say that *there are* cats. Here existence is not applied to a name, or an individual, but to a predicate, or kind. As Russell liked to put the matter, to say that cats exist is to say that the propositional function "*x* is a cat" is sometimes true. The concept of such a propositional function being sometimes true gives, Russell claimed, "the fundamental meaning of the word 'existence.' Other meanings are either derived from this, or embody mere confusion of thought" (Russell 1919: 164).

It is possible, if this line is taken, to recognize that existence is in some sense a predicate. Russell's views are heavily influenced by the work of Frege, who explicitly treated existence as a predicate (or, in his terminology, a "concept"). It is, however, a *second-level* predicate.[6] When attached to a first-level predicate it in effect says that the property expressed by the latter is instantiated. Russell himself often expressed himself in this "Fregean" manner: "Existence is essentially a property of a propositional function" (Russell 1956: 232). The claim that existence is not a first-level predicate, equally with the claim that it is not a predicate at all, is widely thought to undermine Anselm's argument. Indeed, in the final footnote to his paper *"Funktion und Begriff,"* Frege himself writes that "the ontological proof of the existence of God suffers from the error of treating existence as a first-level concept." So, the slogan that "existence is not a predicate" really means that (from the "logical" point of view) existence is not a first-level predicate: which in turn means that existence cannot be meaningfully attached to an individual (or name), but only to a kind (or predicate or first-level "concept").

What, however, of my two examples? Neither "England" nor "Anselm" expresses a general kind. Each is simply a name. Russell held that such ordinary names are ultimately to be construed in terms of predicates. But that view is now widely and correctly rejected. Russell held that there are genuine names. He took "this," at least in some of its possible uses, to be one. He then consistently claimed that "(where *'a'* is a name), the words *'a* exists' are meaningless" (Russell, 1919: 178). More generally, he claimed

that "the actual things that there are in the world do not exist, or, at least, that is putting it too strongly, because that is utter nonsense. To say that they do not exist is strictly nonsense, but to say that they do exist is also strictly nonsense" (Russell 1956: 233). This is not plausible, to put it mildly.

It is sometimes said by those who recognize that ordinary names are indeed genuine names (even from the logical point of view) that sentences in which existence seems to function as a predicate attached to such a name can nevertheless be paraphrased without loss of meaning into quantified sentences. If "England" is correctly treated as a name, "England exists" would then be rendered by "There is something that is identical to England."[7] All that this achieves, however, is the replacement of one predicate by another more complex one. "There is something that is identical to . . ." is a predicate. Perhaps it will be said that this is a different sort of predicate from other "ordinary" predicates. Perhaps it is; but then the precise bearing of such a difference on the Ontological Argument will have to be made clear. The difference is not that the more complex predicate is second-order, as the Fregean approach would have it. A predicate is second-order when it combines with a predicate to produce a proposition. In "There is something that is identical to England," the predicate combines with a name.

Some preferred to express the erstwhile orthodoxy by saying that existence is not a *property* or a *quality* or an *attribute*.[8] Perhaps, in some sense, it is not. But what has any of this really got to do with Anselm's argument? The heart of Anselm's Ontological Argument is the claim that it is greater for something to exist both in reality and in the mind than for it to exist solely in the mind.[9] It is far from clear how any of the discussions about whether "exists" is or is not a predicate, "real" or otherwise, or whether existence is or is not a property or quality or attribute, bear on this claim. Moreover, the claim has some intuitive force. Kant's example of the hundred thalers (an old unit of currency) is well known. "The actual," wrote Kant, "contains nothing more than the merely possible. A hundred actual thalers do not contain the least bit more than a hundred possible ones" (*KrV* A599/B627). Perhaps: though would you not regard your economic situation as greater for possessing an additional hundred actual thalers than for possessing an additional hundred merely possible, imaginary ones?

I am not suggesting that Anselm's "traditional" Ontological Argument is above reproach. It is rather that the common criticisms of it since Kant have been misdirected by focusing on the "predicate" in Anselm's crucial assertions. If there is an irremediable weakness in Anselm's argument, it concerns the "subject." Anselm claims of something that can be conceived—

something that at this stage of the argument may not exist—that "it" can be conceived to exist in reality as well. But what is this "it," if nothing relevant exists? Anselm freely makes reference to possibly nonexistent "intentional objects," and ascribes various attributes to them, in a way that will make many a logician's hair stand on end. On the other hand, there are many highly respected and unrefuted advocates of something like Anselm's position on these matters around today ("free logicians," as they are commonly called)—far more than when the standard "refutations" of Anselm were common coin. A final assessment of the traditional Ontological Argument depends on nothing less than a resolution of the current debate concerning "nonexistent objects" and what may be predicated of "them."

Appendix B

The logical system I employ in the following four appendices is, with one major difference and a number of minor ones, the tableau system presented in Fitting and Mendelsohn (1998: esp. 46–56, 116–121, 150–2).[10] The major difference is that the B system employs, in addition to the Possibility Rules and the Basic Necessity Rules, the Special Necessity Rules T and B—and not, as Fitting and Mendelsohn (1998: 52) have it, the Special Necessity Rules B and 4. As Professor Fitting has kindly confirmed to me, this was an error in the book. At the level of the Modal Predicate Calculus I follow their system as it applies to varying domain models. In other words, here, as throughout this work, quantifiers are treated as "actualist."[11]

A proof in this system takes the form of a *reductio ad absurdum*. After the premises are stated, the negation of the conclusion to be derived is assumed. The proof is complete when every branch of the tableau (though there may be just one branch) is closed. This is represented by a cross at the end of a branch. A branch is closed when it contains either two contradictory lines (i.e., a formula and the negation of that formula), or a formula of the form $\lceil \neg\, \pi = \pi \rceil$, where π is any "parameter": that is, is any arbitrary name that has been introduced by either Universal or Existential Instantiation—which are, together with the two standard rules for Identity, the only two Predicate Calculus rules of inference.[12]

Formulae are prefixed by numerals, which stand for "worlds." "1" stands for the actual world. In the B proofs, where accessibility matters, a decimal point indicates accessibility. So, for example, "2.1," "2.2," etc., and only such, stand for worlds accessible from world 2. Since quantifiers are actualist, parameters are tied to worlds. So a parameter such as "p_2" tags something that exists in world 2.

In S5 there are just two modal rules of inference. Where *"n"* and *"k"* stand for prefixes (i.e. "worlds"), and "X" stands for some well-formed formula, the S5 Possibility Rule allows one to infer $\lceil k\ \mathrm{X} \rceil$ from $\lceil n\ \Diamond \mathrm{X} \rceil$, if *k* is new to the branch. And the S5 Necessity Rule allows one to infer $\lceil k\ \mathrm{X} \rceil$ from $\lceil n\ \Box \mathrm{X} \rceil$, if *k* already occurs on the branch. A negated necessity such as "$\neg\Box$P" is treated as if it were "$\Diamond\neg$P," and so falls under the S5 Possibility rule; and a negated possibility such as "$\neg\Diamond$P" is treated as if it were "$\Box\neg$P," so that the S5 Necessity Rule applies.

In B there are four modal rules of inference. In what follows, "σ" stands for any prefix. The Possibility Rule licenses the inference from $\lceil \sigma\ \Diamond \mathrm{X} \rceil$ to $\lceil \sigma.n\ \mathrm{X} \rceil$, *if* σ.*n is new to the branch*. The (Basic) Necessity Rule licenses the inference

from ⌈σ □X⌉ to ⌈σ.*n* X⌉, if σ.*n already occurs on the branch*. The special necessity rule T licenses the inference from ⌈σ □X⌉ to ⌈σ X⌉, and the special necessity rule B licenses an inference from ⌈σ.*n* □X⌉ to ⌈σ X⌉ for prefixes σ and σ.*n* already occurring on the branch.

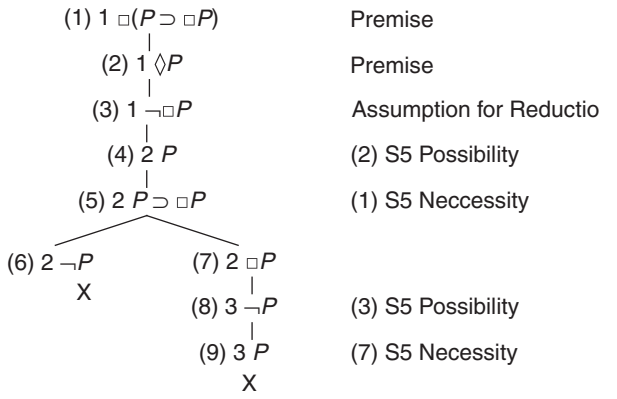
As is common practice, I will cite full justifications only where the modal inference rules are applied, and will not bother with citing a justification where simple Propositional Calculus rules of inference are at work. I should say, however, that in this system a conditional such as "P ⊃ Q" is treated as if it were the disjunction "¬P v Q," and a negated conditional such as "¬(P ⊃ Q)" as if it were the conjunction "P ∧ ¬Q."

Appendix C

Formal Proof of the following in S5:

Necessarily, if God exists, He exists necessarily.
It is possible that God should exist.
Therefore, He exists necessarily.

□(P ⊃ □P)
◊P
Therefore, □P

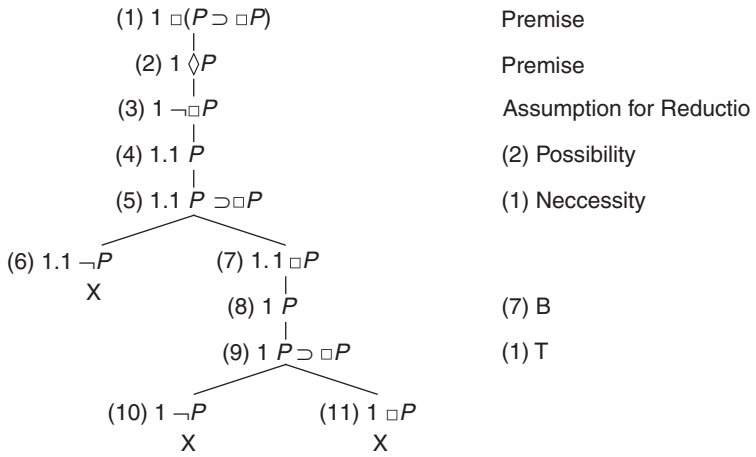


Appendix D

Formal Proof of the following in B:

Necessarily, if God exists, He exists necessarily.
It is possible that God should exist.
Therefore, He exists necessarily.

□(P ⊃ □P)
◊P
Therefore, □P

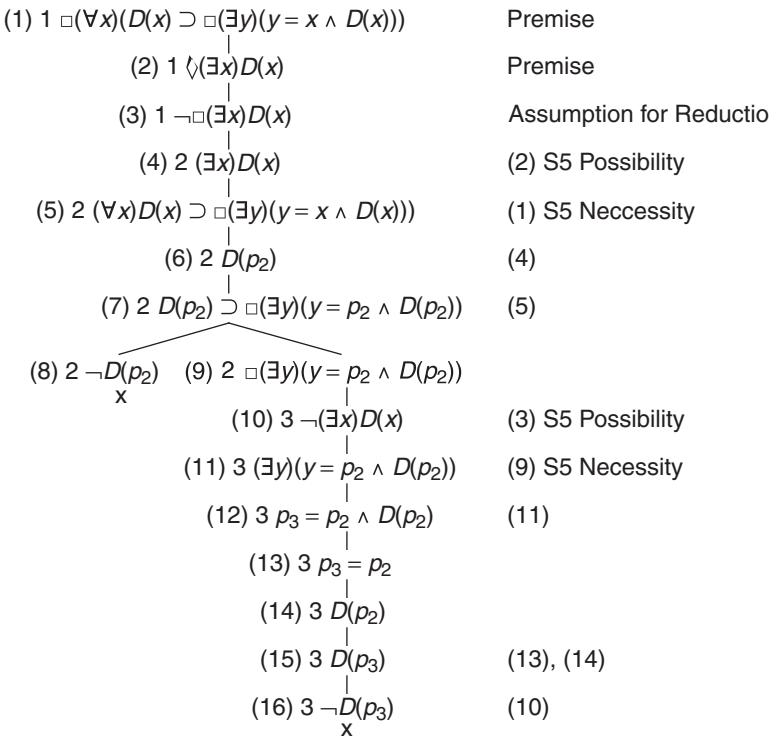


Appendix E

Formal Proof of the following in S5:

Necessarily, if a divine being exists, it exists necessarily and is necessarily divine.
It is possible that a divine being should exist.
Therefore, necessarily, a divine being exists.

□(∀x)(D(x) ⊃ □(∃y)(y=x & D(x)))
◊(∃x)D(x)
Therefore, □ (∃x)D(x)

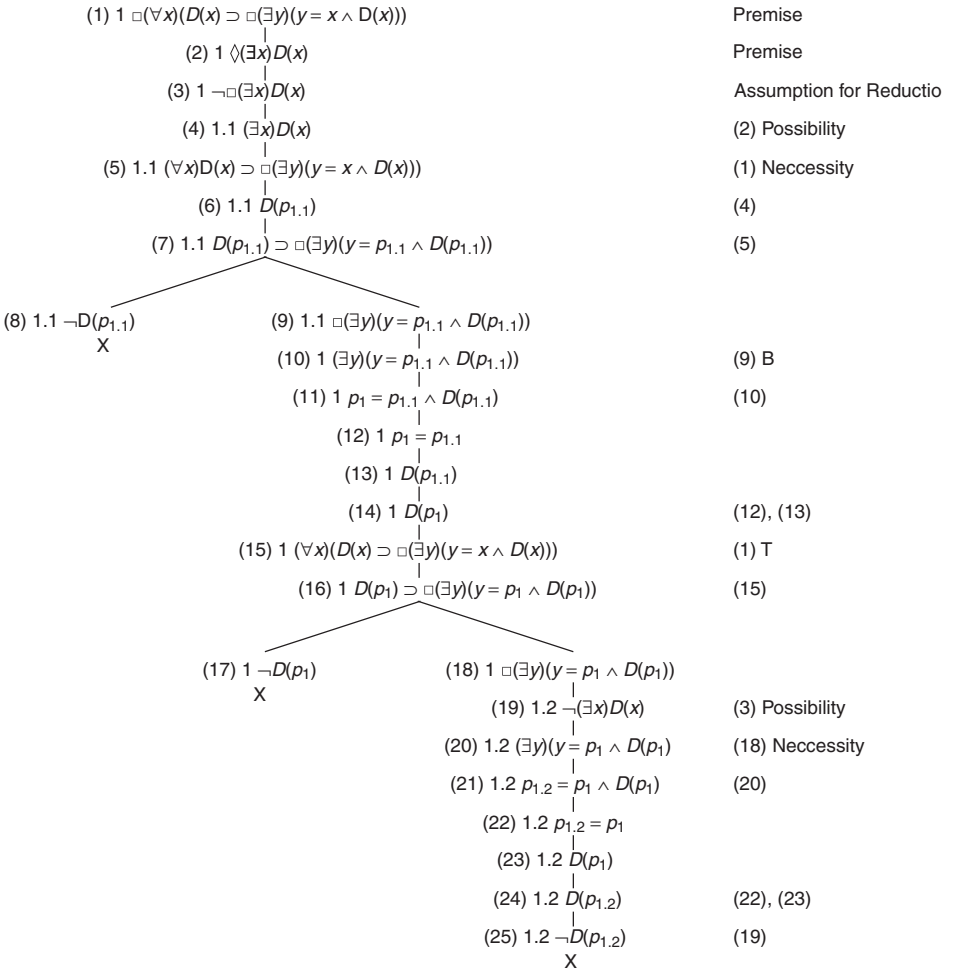

(1) 1 □(∀x)(D(x) ⊃ □(∃y)(y = x ∧ D(x))) Premise
(2) 1 ◊(∃x)D(x) Premise
(3) 1 ¬□(∃x)D(x) Assumption for Reductio
(4) 2 (∃x)D(x) (2) S5 Possibility
(5) 2 (∀x)D(x) ⊃ □(∃y)(y = x ∧ D(x)) (1) S5 Neccessity
(6) 2 D(p2) (4)
(7) 2 D(p2) ⊃ □(∃y)(y = p2 ∧ D(p2)) (5)
(8) 2 ¬D(p2) x
(9) 2 □(∃y)(y = p2 ∧ D(p2))
(10) 3 ¬(∃x)D(x) (3) S5 Possibility
(11) 3 (∃y)(y = p2 ∧ D(p2)) (9) S5 Necessity
(12) 3 p3 = p2 ∧ D(p2) (11)
(13) 3 p3 = p2
(14) 3 D(p2)
(15) 3 D(p3) (13), (14)
(16) 3 ¬D(p3) (10)
x

Appendix F

Formal Proof of the following in B:

Necessarily, if a divine being exists, it exists necessarily and is necessarily divine.
It is possible that a divine being should exist.
Therefore, necessarily, a divine being exists.

□(∀x)(D(x) ⊃ □(∃y)(y=x & D(x)))
◊(∃x)D(x)
Therefore, □(∃x)D(x)


(1) 1 □(∀x)(D(x) ⊃ □(∃y)(y = x ∧ D(x))) Premise
(2) 1 ◊(∃x)D(x) Premise
(3) 1 ¬□(∃x)D(x) Assumption for Reductio
(4) 1.1 (∃x)D(x) (2) Possibility
(5) 1.1 (∀x)D(x) ⊃ □(∃y)(y = x ∧ D(x))) (1) Neccessity
(6) 1.1 D(p1.1) (4)
(7) 1.1 D(p1.1) ⊃ □(∃y)(y = p1.1 ∧ D(p1.1)) (5)
(8) 1.1 ¬D(p1.1)
X
(9) 1.1 □(∃y)(y = p1.1 ∧ D(p1.1))
(10) 1 (∃y)(y = p1.1 ∧ D(p1.1)) (9) B
(11) 1 p1 = p1.1 ∧ D(p1.1) (10)
(12) 1 p1 = p1.1
(13) 1 D(p1.1)
(14) 1 D(p1) (12), (13)
(15) 1 (∀x)(D(x) ⊃ □(∃y)(y = x ∧ D(x))) (1) T
(16) 1 D(p1) ⊃ □(∃y)(y = p1 ∧ D(p1)) (15)
(17) 1 ¬D(p1)
X
(18) 1 □(∃y)(y = p1 ∧ D(p1))
(19) 1.2 ¬(∃x)D(x) (3) Possibility
(20) 1.2 (∃y)(y = p1 ∧ D(p1) (18) Neccessity
(21) 1.2 p1.2 = p1 ∧ D(p1) (20)
(22) 1.2 p1.2 = p1
(23) 1.2 D(p1)
(24) 1.2 D(p1.2) (22), (23)
(25) 1.2 ¬D(p1.2) (19)
X

Appendix G

In Chapter 4 we considered the following argument:

1. It is possible for there to be something that exists necessarily.
2. Necessarily, anything that necessarily exists is, in each possible world in which it exists, greater than is any possible thing that can possibly not exist: that is, is greater than any such latter thing is in any world in which the latter exists.
3. It is possible for there to be something, X, such that nothing possible, in any possible world in which it exists, is greater than X is in any possible world in which X exists.
4. Therefore, X exists.

In Chapter 4 (n 24) I claimed that although this argument is valid in B, that system of modal logic would seriously misrepresent Anselm's thinking. I also suggested that this weakness can be avoided by reformulating the argument's premises. Here I explain these assertions.

First, let us assure ourselves that this argument is indeed valid in B. When interpreted in terms of B, premise (1) tells us that in some possible world W_1 that is accessible from the actual world, there is something Y that exists necessarily in that world: that is, it exists in all worlds W_n accessible from W_1.[13] Moreover, since Y exists necessarily in W_1, we can infer by (2) that it is, in each world in which it exists, greater than is any possible thing that can possibly not exist: that is, it is, in each world W_n, greater than anything in any world W_m, accessible from any such world W_n, that fails to exist in any world accessible from W_m. Now, the actual world is accessible from W_1, because the accessibility relation in B is symmetric, and W_1 has been specified to be accessible from the actual world. In other words, the actual world is one of the worlds W_n; and so Y exists in the actual world. Consider now the possible world that premise (3) directs us to: "W_3" let us call it. It is accessible from the actual world. So it is one of the worlds W_m, since it is accessible from a world accessible from W_1. From premise (2) we can infer that Y, existing in the actual world, is greater than anything in any such world W_m that can possibly not exist: that is, that does not exist in any world accessible from any W_m world. So Y, as it exists in the actual world, is greater than any such contingent thing in W_3. Premise (3), however, tells us (at least) that there is something, X, in W_3 than which there is nothing greater in any world accessible from W_3. But the actual world is

accessible from W_3. So we can conclude that Y exists necessarily in W_3, since otherwise Y in the accessible actual world would be greater than X is in W_3. But if X exists necessarily in W_3, it *actually* exists, since the actual world is accessible from W_3.

Although the argument is valid, its premises, when interpreted in accordance with B, are objectionable as a modal reflection of Anselm's thought. Consider premise (2): Necessarily, anything that necessarily exists is, *in each world in which it exists,* greater than is any possible thing that can possibly not exist. The phrase that I have italicized harbours the problem. Anselm's thought, when modally construed, will license us to regard Y in some world as being greater than X in some world because Y exists necessarily *in the former world* and X exists contingently in the latter—and not just because Y exists necessarily *in some world or other* (accessible from the former world), and yet not in the world in question. In short, the relevant Anselmian "great-making" characteristic is *necessary existence,* not *possibly necessary existence*. If these two are mutually entailing, as they are in S5, there is no problem. But when they come apart, as they do in B, there is. In the above proof we inferred that X exists necessarily in W_3 so as to avoid Y in the actual world being greater that it—in contravention of (3). But it is absurd to make this inference when Y may exist only *contingently* in the actual world.[14] In the proof we were able to make this inference because of the italicized phrase in (2). But that is just what is wrong with it in the context of modal system B.

In order to move closer to a genuinely Anselmian perspective, we could modify (2) as follows:

> Necessarily, anything that necessarily exists is, in each world in which it *necessarily exists,* greater than is any possible thing that can possibly not exist.

If we make this modification, however, the resulting argument will not be valid in B. This is because, for all that the premises of the resulting argument tell us, there may be no necessarily existing object in any world *accessible to* W_3. And if there is not, there is no need for X to exist necessarily in W_3 in order not to be worsted by such a necessary, accessible existent. The only necessary existent postulated by the argument's premises is Y in W_1. And although we can, in B, infer that Y exists in the actual world, which is accessible to W_3, we cannot infer that it exists *necessarily* in the actual world.

The mismatch between Anselm's thinking and the above argument as interpreted in accordance with B is not restricted to premise (2). It runs through the whole argument. Consider premise (1). In B the truth of (1) is compatible with the possible thing in question, Y, possibly not existing (from the perspective of the actual world). Although Y exists in some world W_1 accessible from the actual world, and in all worlds accessible from W_1, there may be a world accessible from the actual world, *but not from* W_1, in which Y does not exist. When we consider this possibility in terms of Anselmian conceivability, it amounts to the idea that we can conceive of something that cannot be conceived not to exist and that can be conceived not to exist. Anselm would have regarded this as a straightforward contradiction! The problem also infects premise (3). This is supposed to reflect Anselm's understanding of *G;* but it miserably fails to do so. For it is compatible with the possible existence of X in (3) that there be some possible object that is greater than X. This is because all that (3) rules out is some object in some world *accessible from X's* W_3 that is, in that accessible world, greater than X in W_3. There may, however, be some object in some world *accessible from the actual world* that is greater than X in W_3, since such a world, given that the accessibility relation in B is not transitive, may not be accessible from W_3.

The source of the above problems is the fact that Anselm had no conception of something being conceivably conceivable that does not just reduce to something being conceivable; whereas the modal equivalent of this fails in B. I think Anselm would have found unintelligible the idea that although something is inconceivable, it is conceivable that it should have been conceivable. In other words, he holds that if something is inconceivable, it is not conceivable that it should have been conceivable. When modally interpreted, this gives us the characteristic axiom of S4: if something is necessary, it is necessarily necessary. Anselm would, I believe, have found equally unintelligible the idea that although something is conceivable, it is conceivable that it should not have been inconceivable.[15] In other words, he holds that if something is conceivable, it is inconceivable that it should not have been inconceivable. When modally interpreted, this gives us the characteristic axiom of S5: if something is possible, it is necessarily possible. In short, if we interpret Anselm's talk about conceivability modally, we do so most faithfully when we do it in S5. It is true, perhaps, that Anselm never even considered iterating conceivability; whereas S5 abounds in iterated modal operators. Anselm simply had no time for what might be merely conceivably conceivable. He is simply interested in what is and is not conceivable.[16] The important point, however, is that S5, unlike B, does not al-

low modal equivalents of things that Anselm would have regarded as positively absurd. In S5, something is possibly possible just in case it is possible, possibly necessary just in case it is necessary, and so on.

Perhaps the most honest way of facing up to these facts is to admit that Anselm's arguments are to be assessed in S5. If that is right, we need to respond to Nathan Salmon's objection to S5, which we considered in Chapter 1, in the first of the two ways that were there suggested. Salmon's counterexamples to S5 are irrelevant to the kinds of states of affairs with which alone Anselm is interested. There is, however, another option. We can reformulate our argument so that, even when it is interpreted in accordance with B, it does not state things that run plain counter to Anselm's thought. Rather than having the first premise state that it is possible for something to exist necessarily, let us have it state that it is possible for something to exist *essentially necessarily*. This is to be interpreted as meaning that in some possible world accessible from the actual world there is some object that exists necessarily both in that world and in every world accessible from that world. The first premise can then be re-stated as follows:

> (1′) It is possible for there to be something that necessarily exists necessarily.

Since the possible thing in question exists in a world accessible from the actual world, the actual world is accessible from that possible world; and so the possible thing in question not only exists, but exists necessarily, in the actual world—and, hence, exists (though perhaps not necessarily) in every world accessible from the actual world: in every "actually possible" world, as we might put it. This reflects Anselm's conviction that if we can conceive of something whose nonexistence is inconceivable, we cannot conceive that thing's nonexistence. We can now re-instate the reformulation of (2) that was mooted above, but rejected because it would result in an argument that is invalid in B:

> (2′) Necessarily, anything that necessarily exists is, in each world in which it *necessarily exists,* greater than is any possible thing that can possibly not exist: that is, it is greater than any such latter thing is in any world in which the latter exists.

The reason why this would have led to invalidity in B, if it had been substituted in the original version of the argument, is that (1) does not allow us

to infer that its possible object (Y in W_1) exists *necessarily* in the actual world. (1′), however, does. We also need to beef up (3), so that it at least approximates to Anselm's understanding of *G*. We can do so by inserting another possibility operator:

> (3′) It is possible for there to be something, X, such that nothing *possibly* possible, in any possible world in which it exists, is greater than X is in any possible world in which X exists.

This ensures that the range of X's greatness (in W_3) encompasses all objects in all worlds *accessible from the actual world:* in other words, all actually possible objects. It does so because the first possibility operator gets us to the actual world (since accessibility is symmetric in B); and the second possibility operator gets us to all worlds accessible from the actual world.

Not only do the three modified premises bring the argument, as interpreted according to B, in line with Anselm's views; from them we can validly conclude in B that the X in (3′) actually exists. From (1′) we can conclude not merely that Y actually exists, but that it necessarily exists. From (2′) we can conclude that Y in the actual world is greater than anything in any world accessible from the actual world if the latter does not exist necessarily in such a world. X in W_3 is such an accessible object. But, as (3′) tells us, X in W_3 is such that nothing in any world accessible to W_3 is greater than X is in W_3. So X must exist necessarily in W_3, so as not to be worsted by Y in the actual world, which is accessible from W_3. So X exists in the actual world (since, again, it is accessible from W_3). Furthermore, (3′) tells us that X is such that nothing in any world accessible from any world accessible from W_3 is greater than X is in W_3. Since the actual world is accessible from W_3, the "maximal greatness" of Y extends to *all worlds accessible from the actual world*. So, we have just proved the existence of something than which nothing greater is possible.[17] We have not demonstrated that this thing exists necessarily. This, however, can be achieved by bringing (2′) into play again. For if X in the actual world does not exist necessarily, Y in the accessible world W_1 would be greater than X actually is.

NOTES

Introduction

1. The term I have translated as "conceived" is derived from the verb *cogitare:* to think. The most straightforward translation of Anselm would therefore have him discussing something than which a greater cannot be *thought*—as many English translators do. There is absolutely nothing wrong with this. I have opted for the alternative rendering, in large part, because in certain grammatical constructions, which Anselm himself employs, "think" in English has the force of *believe*. This is never what Anselm has in mind.

2. Since Anselm, other versions of the Ontological Argument have been propounded—most famously by Descartes and Leibniz. The precise relation between these "Rationalist" versions of the Ontological Argument and Anselm's own is still a matter of controversy. We shall not be entering into it in these pages.

3. (All translations in the present work are my own.) Interestingly, it is known that the library at Bec, where Anselm lived for over thirty years, possessed a copy of this work in the twelfth century, and possibly before. See Southern (1990: 129).

4. In the first passage to which I have made reference, Augustine in fact writes about *thought trying to attain* a conception of something that is better than everything else. Perhaps the idea of something than which a better cannot be conceived is therefore implicit in this passage. But if it is, it is only implicit.

5. Boethius, with whose work Anselm was familiar, had also claimed that nothing better than God can be conceived (*Cons.* III, Prose 10).

6. This at least is how the argument is commonly interpreted (especially among philosophers). Later in this Introduction we shall come across reasons to doubt this common view.

7. For more on Anselm's "traditional" Ontological Argument, and a defence of this claim, see Appendix A.

8. I should say that Russell makes this comment is relation to Leibniz's "Rationalist" version of the argument. The judgment is perhaps even more apposite in relation to Anselm's original version.

9. Necessary existence is a "real predicate" in Kant's sense, because it "determines" the concept of the subject, and qualifies the thing's nature or "content," as Kant requires. (More on this in Appendix A.) Perhaps the clearest way of seeing this is by implementing Kant's suggestion that necessity as it applies to objects is to be understood hypothetically. Kant accepts that the proposition that triangles have three angles is absolutely necessary. But, he claims, this proposition "does not say that three angles are simply necessary, but that, under the condition that there is a triangle, there are also necessarily three angles" (*KrV* A594/B622). Kant's proposal, in other words, is that we express the necessity of triangles having three angles by saying, "Necessarily, if any triangle exists, it has three angles." If we apply this proposal to the idea that existence is a real predicate contained in the concept of God, or that it is one of God's essential perfections, what results is the absurdly trivial claim that, necessarily, if God exists, He exists. When we turn from existence to necessary existence, there is no such problem. There is nothing at all untoward or trivial in claiming that, necessarily, if God exists, He exists necessarily.

10. Hartshorne also claims that these two versions of the Ontological Argument can be found in Descartes. Later, Hartshorne (1965: 36) pointed out that two figures before him had detected two different Ontological Arguments: Robert Flint, in the nineteenth century, in relation to Descartes, and Karl Barth, in the 1930s, in relation to Anselm. (I should say that the latter claim reflects, in my view, a very strange reading of Barth.) It is perhaps worth mentioning that certain mediaeval discussions of Anselm focus on the supposed "second argument." See Daniels (1909: 38, 57, 73).

11. In case it needs saying, all emphasis within quotations from Anselm is my own.

12. In case you do not, perhaps the following will help: Something is absolutely necessary just in case there is *no* sense of "possible," other than a merely epistemic one, according to which it is possible that the thing in question not be.

13. All commentators agree that Anselm's early work, the *Monologion,* contains an argument for the existence of a "supreme essence" that he identified with God. I shall, however, be leaving this argument to one side, except for the light it may throw on Anselm's later work. Its strongly Platonic (or Neoplatonic) character means that it is likely to appeal to few today.

14. Brian Leftow (2002) has a paper entitled "Anselm's Neglected Argument." Leftow sees that the passage in Anselm that contains the argument in question is not an expression of the Modal Ontological Argument. He treats it, however, as a self-contained argument, whereas it is, in fact, but the tail end of

a passage that gives expression to what I myself regard as Anselm's "other argument"—an argument of which Leftow shows no recognition. D. P. Henry (1967:147–8), who finds no Modal Ontological Argument in Anselm, discerns a second argument in a passage from Anselm's *Reply.* Although the passage is related to those I shall be focusing on, it does not itself constitute a proof of anything of substance, since its conclusion is that something than which a greater cannot be conceived cannot be conceived not to exist *if it exists*. Some writers—for example, Nakhnikian (1967: 34) and Robert Merrihew Adams (1971a: 40)—have briefly mentioned a passage in the *Reply* that is clearly not a version of the Modal Ontological Argument. It is, indeed, one of the places where Anselm's "other argument" surfaces. Not only do they not seriously attend to this argument, however, they fail to see that it is the expression of a fundamental form of argument that also underlies the passages in the *Reply* that have been mistaken for versions of the Modal Ontological Argument. Sandra Visser and Thomas Williams (2009: 83–92) come closest to recognizing what I am calling Anselm's "other argument" and recognizing its importance. Indeed, they overestimate its role in Anselm's thought, and suppose that this is the argument that Anselm presents even in *Proslogion II.* (See Appendix A for a few more details.) There are, however, two more serious weaknesses in their discussion. First, they give no more than a brief sketch of the argument they have in mind. And when they state (2009: 92) that the argument is a version of the Modal Ontological Argument, one must wonder how much of the character of Anselm's "other argument" they have in fact grasped. Second, they fail to give the argument any philosophical assessment. (Perhaps this would be out of place in a book such as Visser and Willams's, which is a general account of Anselm's thought as a whole—by far the best book of this kind available, in my opinion.)

15. Anselm's employment of "if you do not believe, you will not understand" echoes Augustine, who is quoting Isaiah 7:9 in the "Old Latin" version of the Bible. Jerome's Vulgate has (in translation) "if you do not believe, you will not remain [or stand fast: *permanebitis*]." The former follows the Septuagint, the latter the Hebrew. Modern versions of the Bible follow the latter.

16. We shall briefly return to this issue in Chapter 2.

17. Anselm refers to a single *"argumentum."* I should perhaps mention that there is some dispute about what exactly this term means. It may mean an argument; but it may also refer, several writers have suggested, to the very notion of *something than which a greater cannot be conceived.* Fortunately this particular interpretative issue is not important for to us.

18. There is no reason not to believe that these headings go back to Anselm himself. The similar headings in *Cur Deus homo* certainly do, as Anselm himself attests in the Preface to that work.

19. See, for example, Southern (1990: 71–82) and Knowles (1962: 100–1). In the Preface to his *Monologion,* Anselm writes that in repeatedly going over

that work he has not been able to find anything he has said that fails to be consistent with what the catholic Fathers "and above all Saint Augustine" have written. Indeed, he asks of those who have reservations about anything he has written that they first thoroughly read the books of Augustine's *De Trinitate* "and judge my work by them."

20. Of the many passages that could be adduced in support of this claim, let the following three suffice: "That truly exists [*vere est*] which endures unchangeably" (*Conf.* 7.11.17); "[God] alone truly exists, because He is unchangeable" (*De Trin.* 7.5.10); "True being [*verum esse*] is unchangeable being" (*Enn. in Ps.* 134.4).

21. Ian Logan (2009: 95) has recently suggested that *sic vere est ut nec cogitari possit non esse,* which I have translated as "exists so truly that it cannot be conceived not to exist," should be translated, rather, as "truly exists in such a way, that it cannot be thought not to exist." (The conceived/thought difference is, of course, immaterial.) Logan suggests that my (and the usual) "Neoplatonic" rendering is possible, but not demanded by the text. Logan's reading, equally with the more common one, counts against Stolz, of course. However, for various reasons—not least, as I have just pointed out, that Anselm later echoes the point he is making here by writing of existing "most truly" and "maximally"—I prefer the more usual "Neoplatonic" translation.

22. The attribution specifically *to Gaunilo* of the well-known response to Anselm, to which Anselm in turn replied, is based on fragile evidence. (See Logan 2009: 116). Since this historical issue is of no moment as far as we are concerned, I shall follow the traditional attribution.

23. Moreover, in order to deflect the apparent force of the fact that the heading to *Proslogion II* is "That God truly exists," Stolz would have to claim that Anselm is advertising that he here proves (or at least discusses) God's eternity. But he does no such thing. Anselm is concerned, rather, with the issue of existing in reality *(in re)* as well as in the mind. The issue of eternity is not broached until later in the work.

24. The Latin phrase I have translated "something than which a greater" is not *"aliquid quo maius"* but simply *"quo maius"* (literally "greater than which")—a phrase that can in Latin, unlike English, serve as the subject of a verb. I shall always translate it as I have here.

25. Similarly, in the *Monologion* Anselm claims to offer a proof, based on reason alone, of the existence and nature of a "supreme essence" that will be convincing even to those who are ignorant of, or who deny, the truths of faith, so long as they are of moderate ability (M 1).

26. Anselm does indeed state that *we* "believe You to be something than which nothing greater can be conceived"—which indicates that Anselm took it that others agreed with him. There is every reason, however, to take the reference of this "we" to be restricted to faithful believers. The suggestion would then be that it is precisely their faith that sustains this acknowledgement.

27. Why, it may be asked, since the argument of *Proslogion II* concerns *G* rather than God, does the heading to this section advertise a proof that *God* really exists? The answer is that the headings are designed for those for whom the work as a whole was designed: his fellow monks at Bec (as Anselm informs us in the Preface to this work). They, of course, will be at one with the profession of faith that precedes the argument of *Proslogion II:* the identification of *G* with God. *They* understand that a proof of *G* is a proof of God.

28. In the thirteenth century Henry of Ghent pointed to this passage as constituting an essential step in Anselm's proof of God's existence. The passage is excerpted in Daniels (1909: 80).

29. This passage seems to draw on Augustine. I mentioned earlier that Augustine had claimed that no one can conceive anything *better* than God. He goes on to say that since what is incorruptible is better than what is corruptible, God must be incorruptible, for otherwise "I would be able in thought to attain to something that is better than my God" (*Conf.* 7.4.6). It is worth noting that here in *Proslogion III* Anselm for the first time employs the phrase "better than which," rather than "greater than which."

30. Richard Campbell (1976: 138–147) focuses on this as constituting a last crucial step in Anselm's proof of God's existence.

31. The phrase comes from Nielsen (1967).

32. There are some, particularly in the "continental tradition" of modern philosophy, who would object to this as confining God within "ontotheology." I regard this as a most important issue; but it is too big to be addressed in these pages.

1. The Modal Ontological Argument

1. Most people believe in grades of necessity. Some (such as causal necessity, perhaps) are commonly regarded as being weaker than others (such as formal logical necessity). The sense of "absolute" necessity that is in play here is such that no notion of necessity is "stronger." Or, as I put it in the Introduction: something holds with absolute necessity just in case there is no sense of "possible," other than a merely epistemic one, according to which it is possible for it not to be.

2. An issue concerning "absolute" and "relative" perfections lurks here; but the qualifications that need to be made to the original Anselmian principle are well known.

3. Although Hartshorne was the first to publish a formalized version of the Modal Ontological Argument, Kurt Gödel had begun to formulate such an argument in the early 1940s. Gödel showed a version of his proof to Dana Scott in 1970. The proof was finally published in Sobel (1987). For more historical details, see Adams (1995).

4. The notion of necessity here is absolute necessity. Hartshorne (1962: 53) makes this clear.

5. I should perhaps mention that Hartshorne (1962: 61)—like Malcolm, as we shall see—attempts to derive non-contingency from a lack of dependence. I propose to leave such issues aside until later in the present work. In focusing for the moment exclusively on Hartshorne's presentation of the Modal Ontological Argument in logical guise, I am (temporarily) doing a disservice to Hartshorne's rich overall position. He most certainly would not have wanted a neat logical argument to be wrenched out of its metaphysical setting in his thought. I should also mention that Hartshorne is, as he terms it, a "neoclassical" theist. He is, in other words, a "Process" philosopher and theologian, who believes that God can, indeed must, *change*. Hartshorne (e.g., 1962: 33, 58–68) even argues that the Modal Ontological Argument does not work unless this is true. I shall not be exploring this side to Hartshorne's position, if only because I believe that this last claim in particular is false.

6. This formulation begs no questions, because it covers both the case in which God does not exist—"If God existed, He would exist necessarily"—and the case in which He does—"If God does exist, He exists necessarily."

7. Since the "logical" way of presenting the Modal Ontological Argument is meant to derive strength from the rigour of modal logic, I give a formal presentation of the argument in Appendix C. (It is preceded by a brief explanation of the logical system I employ in Appendix B.)

8. A great deal has been written about what "ontological commitments" talk of possible worlds incurs. I realize that much more could be said on this issue, but here I shall simply state that I treat talk about possible worlds as a handy and intuitive way of getting a sense of the logic of modal systems and of representing our understanding of the notions of (absolute) possibility and necessity. It is the latter that are basic.

9. This is not the only way to avoid the problem. Alvin Plantinga (1974: 214–6) formulates a version of the Modal Ontological Argument that is conducted in terms of possible instantiations of properties and essences. (For those in the know: Plantinga adopts this approach because he is a "serious actualist.") The arguments I am about to construct can easily be reformulated along Plantingian lines.

10. This assumption allows Hartshorne to conduct his argument at the level of the modal Propositional Calculus. Dropping it, as I am about to do, means that the modal argument will have to be conducted at the level of the Predicate Calculus.

11. Alvin Plantinga (1974: 213) pointed out the need to avoid this loophole.

12. I should mention that not all such metaphysical issues have this merely ancillary relevance. It must at least be established that all possible divine beings are *compossible,* since our argument will prove the actual existence of all of them. This issue is related to "Gaunilo-style" objections to the argument, which we shall consider later in this chapter.

13. A formal proof of this version of the argument is given in Appendix D.

14. Technically, the "accessibility relation" between possible worlds in S5 is an equivalence relation: it is reflexive, transitive, and symmetric.

15. If an inch seems too big, you can make the difference as small as you like. The argument will go through so long as there is some tolerance, however small.

16. The idea that there is such a precise cut-off point is of course silly. Salmon argues at some length that the undoubted vagueness in the limits of tolerance does not undermine his argument. He is right.

17. More technically, Salmon has plausibly shown that although the W_1 world (the possible world in which T is made from W_1) is accessible from the actual world, and the W_2 world is accessible from the W_1 world, the W_2 world is not accessible from the actual world. In other words, accessibility is not transitive—as it is in S4 (and S5).

18. We can also see that the example directly invalidates S5. S5's characteristic axiom is that if something is possible, it is necessarily possible. Suppose that I had made T from a portion of the large piece of wood one inch to the left of where I actually made it (i.e., from $W_{1)}$. Although this is a possibility for T, given how it was actually made, it would not have been a possibility if T had been made, as is possible, from a portion of the larger chunk of wood one inch to the *right* of where I actually made it. So it is not *necessary* that being made from W_1 is a possibility for T, even though it actually is.

19. In Appendices E and F I give formal Propositional and Predicate Calculus proofs in B.

20. Salmon's counter-example does not afflict B because its accessibility relation is reflexive and symmetric—and not, like that of S4 and S5, transitive.

21. From now on I shall sometimes drop the qualification "or a divine being," though the reasons for its introduction should be borne in mind.

22. Alternatively, one could reject the claim that God can possibly exist, if necessary existence is taken to be an essential divine attribute. These two responses really amount to the same thing.

23. Hick got the term "factual necessity" from Penelhum (1960), who made a few remarks by way of distinguishing it from logical necessity.

24. The distinction between eternity and sempiternity will be discussed later in this chapter.

25. Hick's derivation of incorruptibility from aseity is somewhat weak. A better argument than the one he offers would be that only composite beings are corruptible, and that any composite being can be destroyed. Given this, if indestructibility follows from aseity, so does incorruptibility.

26. Hick's account of factual necessity needs to be clarified, or perhaps extended, at little. When he states that a factually necessary being cannot be destroyed by anything, that there "could be no power capable of abolishing it,"

he does not make it clear that what is to be ruled out is destruction by any *logically possible* being (or "power"). If this is not stated, Hick's account is compatible with an entity's factual necessity being dependent upon perhaps contingent laws of nature—something that Hick would not want.

27. The initial "necessarily" can remain an expression of logical necessity, since Hick claims that factual necessity is an essential ingredient in the very conception of God. (And so, therefore, is my recent strengthening of Hick's notion.)

28. Hick (1968) himself argues against the Modal Ontological Argument along these very lines.

29. Kripke (1972) was of course a major step in the demolition of the former orthodoxy. For somewhat different considerations that undermine that orthodoxy, see Zalta (1988), who shows that that there are logical and analytical truths that are not necessary.

30. For a good rebuttal of the old arguments, see, for example, Adams (1971b).

31. What are in question here are arguments that focus specifically on the non-contingency of divine existence. There are, of course, arguments aplenty to the effect that certain core divine attributes are either incoherent or mutually incompatible. I am setting such considerations to one side. As I said above, if you think that God could not possibly exist, there is not much point in your even considering the arguments we are concerned with here.

32. Gaunilo asked Anselm to conceive of a wondrous island, and claimed that if the traditional Ontological Argument of *Proslogion II* worked, we could prove the existence of this island. Incidentally, it is astonishing how many commentators suppose that Gaunilo's objection concerns a conceivable *perfect* island. Gaunilo does not suggest this; nor does Anselm interpret him in this way. Gaunilo is considering an island that is conceived to be "more excellent" *(praestantior)* than any existing island. Gaunilo's objection is based on a misunderstanding that runs throughout his response to Anselm, and which Anselm picks up on in his *Reply*. Gaunilo takes Anselm to be concerned with conceiving something that is greater than anything else *that actually exists:* whereas, of course, Anselm was concerned with conceiving something that is greater than anything else *that is conceivable*. More on such matters in later chapters.

33. Apart, of course, from those I am ignoring. See n31 above.

34. See, for example, his paper *"Quod ens perfectissimum existit"* (Leibniz 1965: VII, 261–2).

35. For commentary on and emendations and extensions of Gödel's proof, see, for example, Anderson (1990), Sobel (1987 and 2003), Fitting (2002: 138–172), and Pruss (2009).

36. At least, that is, when the quantifiers are taken to be objectual and actualist (rather than either substitutional or possibilist). Maydole so takes them; and his argument requires that they be so taken.

37. I say that it can be read in this way, because I am about to extract certain thoughts from what Malcolm himself presents as a direct argument for God's actual existence. I did not present this argument at the beginning of this chapter because of the issues that are about to arise.

38. As I have mentioned, I am extracting certain considerations from what Malcolm presented as a direct argument for God's existence. The passage I have just quoted continues: "Thus God's existence is either impossible or necessary." Malcolm then goes on to claim that since God's existence is not impossible, God exists necessarily.

39. Plantinga (1961: 97–101) recognizes this further dimension to Malcolm's argument, and addresses it.

40. "From the supposition that it could happen that God did not exist it would follow that, if He existed, He would have mere duration and not eternity" (Malcolm 1960: 48).

41. *"Aeternitatis igitur est interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio":* Eternity, therefore, is the total simultaneous and perfect possession of endless life (*Cons.* V, Prose 6).

42. The first to deny that God is eternal in this sense was, as far as I can determine, Socinus in the sixteenth century.

43. On the former conception time is usually understood as itself coming into existence with Creation, and hence as being finite (at least in the past direction).

44. Although we need not concern ourselves with it, I should perhaps mention that a notion of *aeviternity* was sometimes distinguished. It was attributed to the angels, who lacked the absolute eternity of God, and yet whose existence was not tied up with the strictly temporal changes of the material creation that would attach to a sempiternal being.

45. One might perhaps doubt whether this would explain Malcolm's insistence that raising temporal questions does not "make sense" in relation to God. It should be borne in mind, however, that Wittgensteinians such as Malcolm tend to claim that things make no sense more commonly than other philosophers. In particular, they often characterize as senseless the raising of a question that has an absolutely self-evident answer. The raising of such a question would, the idea is, be unintelligible. If it is completely obvious that God, if He exists, exists sempiternally, raising the question how long God has existed would perhaps be silly to the point of unintelligibility.

46. Recall that contingency, for Malcolm, means the *logical possibility* (and non-necessity) of not existing.

47. For an extensive discussion of the problems, though with a favourable judgment on the idea, see Leftow (1991).

48. I should say that on a couple of occasions Malcolm construes the contingent "duration" that we considered in connection with his first thesis as an

existence that is, though perhaps endless, *dependent*. So Malcolm's two theses may not be as independent from one another as my presentation suggests. If that is the case, the remarks I am about to make count against the first thesis.

49. Although Malcolm does not spell this out, he perhaps implies that this claim should be made with respect to any conceivable object that can *possibly* not exist. God's non-existence would then be *absolutely* ruled out, and His existence demonstrated to be necessary.

50. Plantinga (1961: 101), who rightly sees this as "the heart of Malcolm's argument," writes that "I must confess inability to see the inconsistency."

2. Anselm's Understanding of Conceivability

1. For the significance of the distinction between God and *G* in relation to Anselm, see the Introduction. For the need for the argument to deal with "logical" modalities, see Chapter 1.

2. See the first footnote to the Introduction for an explanation of this choice of translation. The grounds for it solely concern style and idiom. The reader should not think that I am foisting on Anselm a modern understanding of what is "conceivable." It is the entire purpose of the present chapter to determine what it was that Anselm meant when he stated that something can or cannot "be thought."

3. I say "all but" totally because a couple of arguments can be found in Anselm that could be interpreted modally, but that seem not to rely on issues of conceivability. We shall consider them in a later chapter.

4. This chapter has a further significance. It is the overall purpose of the present work to unearth and assess Anselm's "other argument"—an argument in which Anselm also appeals to what is and is not conceivable. This argument can only be properly assessed, however, for reasons that will emerge, if it is interpreted modally. Such an interpretation will be plausible only if Anselm's reference to what is conceivable has modal import.

5. See, for example, Barnes (1972: 23), Campbell (1976: 105), La Croix (1972: 51).

6. At one point Anselm indeed asks, "Does that which has been shown by necessary truth to exist in reality [*sc. G*] exist in no intellect?" (R 2). This question is clearly meant rhetorically. Anselm should not, however, be interpreted as inferring here that *G* exists in the intellect from the fact that it exists in reality, but from the fact that *G* has been conclusively *shown* so to exist. Such a demonstration must be carried out by an intellect.

7. Incidentally, although La Croix is right to argue against a "logical" interpretation of Anselm's explicit modal language, his actual argument is seriously flawed. He cites passages that in fact concern conceivability as if they concerned possibility.

8. Rogers is not the only person to have taken this line. For another, see Teske (1988). I shall, however, focus on Rogers's presentation of the case, since it is the most detailed and extensive.

9. I should say that Anselm actually writes "*if* it says nothing other than Himself and what is created"; but he clearly allows the truth of the antecedent.

10. Anselm uses the genitive to express "for." So what he literally says is that a word must be a word *of* something.

11. Strictly speaking, for both Augustine and Anselm God performs only *one action*—or, rather, in a sense *is* one (timeless) action. The present point would be, therefore, more adequately expressed by asking whether every facet of God's singular will has its sufficient rational ground.

12. The literature on this topic is considerable. I particularly recommend Oakley (1984) and Courtenay (1984).

13. This is a recurrent idea within the tradition. See, to take just one earlier example, Gregory of Nyssa (*De opif.* 21.5).

14. The phrase is often attributed to Duns Scotus, but it seems actually to have originated with Francis of Meyronnes: See Ignatius Brady (1955, esp. 191–2). It is perhaps worth mentioning that the development of this doctrine, and this way of looking at the matter, received significant and lasting impetus from *De conceptione Santae Mariae* written by Anselm's follower and biographer Eadmer—a work believed in the Middle Ages to have been by Anselm himself.

15. For a clear example of Anselm's refusal to infer necessity from fittingness witness the following: "Although the Son of God was in all truth conceived by a most pure virgin, this did not, however, happen from necessity, as if righteous offspring could not with reason [*rationabiliter*] be generated from sinful parents by this mode of propagation, but because it was fitting that the conception of this man should be from a mother most pure" (CV 18).

16. The example that Anselm gives is virginity. To remain a virgin is, Anselm says, better than to marry. But we do not judge that those who marry are doing what they ought not to do.

17. The following proposition was included in those condemned by Pope Innocent II: "That God can only do, or refrain from doing, those things that He does do, or refrains from doing, just in the way or just at the time He does, and not otherwise" (Denzinger 726).

18. I have been focusing on what I regard as Rogers's two primary arguments for her conclusion. She also urges that it seems not to make sense to suppose that a timeless being such as God could act differently from the way He does. Clearly there are numerous examples of thinkers, again including Aquinas, who thought they could make sense of this.

19. See, for example, Augustine, *De civ.* 11.22, and Anselm, CD 9–11.

20. There are two or three other passages of this kind. Jaakko Hintikka has claimed that there are numerous passages that express this "statistical" understanding of necessity and possibility, as he terms it (1973, esp. ch. 5). Like many who have responded to Hintikka's work, I am unpersuaded by the majority of those cited by Hintikka. But that the claim is there in Aristotle is undeniable. For a balanced discussion of this whole issue, see Sorabji (1980: esp. ch. 8).

21. It is not even the case, as Knuuttila suggests in relation to a potentiality that goes unrealized in a particular, finitely existing individual, that such a potentiality must at least sometime be realized in *some member of the kind* to which the individual belongs (1993, 46–7)—a suggestion that has some basis in Aristotle (*Top* VI.6, 145b27f). Augustine, for example, states that it could have been the case that human bodies were never to die, even though they were mortal, and so *could* die (*De pecc. mer.,* 1.5.5). He also claims that there never has been and never will be a wholly righteous human being, but that there could have been one (*De pecc. mer.,* 2.6.7–2.7.8).

22. A fact that Rogers fully recognizes, as she has subsequently made clear (Rogers, 2008, esp. Ch. 4). Rogers, I should perhaps say, continues to deny this kind of freedom to God.

23. Anselm has, I take it, immaterial souls in mind.

24. The force of the little word "even" *(vel)* should not be underestimated. The clear suggestion is that the claim that something cannot be conceived is stronger than the claim that it is not the case.

25. This applies even to God: He exists through Himself.

26. And in relation to conduct and "value," it is reason that "understands rightness" (C 1.6). Indeed, the fundamental reason why God has created rational creatures is that they may be able to distinguish between what is good and what is bad (CDH 2.1).

27. I should say that Anselm recognizes another sort of inner, natural word that puts us in touch with the things themselves: sense perception. This, however, is limited to individual corporeal things (M 10).

28. So an argument can be both necessary and not "probable," since it may be based on truth, and yet few recognize this.

29. In case it is objected that I am citing evidence for what the traditional understanding of a necessary argument was, whereas what we are interested in is what a necessary *reason* may have meant for these writers, I should say that an argument was regarded as a reason. As Boethius puts the matter, "An argument is a reason that produces belief in relation to something that is in doubt" (*De top. diff.* 1174C).

30. The issues here are, in fact, not wholly straightforward, as we shall see in the following chapter.

3. Anselm's Understanding of Possibility

1. For a brief, clear account of Aquinas's argument, with special attention given to the issue of necessity, see Patterson Brown (1964).

2. On at least one occasion Aquinas says that such a termination of the existence of a necessary being, as a result of God withdrawing the "influx" of being to it, is "*impossibile*," since it conflicts with the immutability of the divine will (*In I Sent.,* d. 8, q. 3, a. 2). Even so, that God created the world in the first place is certainly not regarded by Aquinas as necessary in any sense. (Abelard's dissent from this was, as I noted in the previous chapter, quite exceptional.)

3. If the reader wonders how Aquinas reconciles this view with the biblical passages that speak of heaven and earth passing away (e.g., Mt. 24:35 and Rev. 21:1) and of the sun being darkened (Mt. 24:29), perhaps I should say that it was Aquinas's view that the heavenly bodies themselves will remain in existence for ever, though their movement will be brought to an end, and the sun (temporarily) darkened, through a supernatural act of God (*ST* IIIa, qq. 73–4).

4. In a careful consideration of Aquinas's various accounts of necessity and contingency that he produced throughout his career, Guy Jalbert shows both that the predominant early influence on Aquinas in this connection was Avicenna, and that from the time of the *Summa contra gentiles* Aquinas adopted a more orthodox Aristotelian account of these matters. See Jalbert (1961: 138 and 240).

5. The so-called *Logica Vetus* comprised Porphyry's *Isagoge,* Aristotle's *Categories* and *De Interpetatione,* and Boethius's commentaries on the latter two. As R. W. Southern (1963: 17) notes with respect to Anselm, "There is ample evidence of an entire familiarity with . . . the whole body of Aristotelian logic transmitted in the translations and commentaries of Boethius." Henry (1967: ch. 5) details numerous parallels between Boethius's work and Anselm's. Certain parallels are also noted by Lewry (1981: 100–2), who also gives a detailed account of the knowledge and transmission of Boethius's logical writings in the early Middle Ages.

6. This doctrine is at work in Aquinas's Third Way, to which I referred above: "What possibly does not exist does not exist at some time" (*S Th,* Ia, q.2, a. 3).

7. It is certainly true that Boethius can on occasion identify himself with the Peripatetics. He refers, for example, to "our Peripatetics," and a little later contrasts a non-Aristotelian point of view with "ours" (*In Perih*. 2.194–5). These passages, however, are part of a discussion of Aristotelian views as opposed to those of the Stoics and Epicureans. These three are presented as exhaustive alternatives on the matter in hand. Given only these options, Boethius of course sides with the Aristotelians.

8. Henry also enlists the testimony of Gerbert, who was writing about a century before Anselm, to demonstrate the general acceptance of the Aristotelian

perspective on modality in the early Middle Ages. Gerbert, too, however, explicitly says that his intention is to expound the views of Aristotle. And at one point he refers to a view of Aristotle's as one that "the philosophers have held [*putaverunt*]" (*De rationali,* 162A).

9. Boethius's tractate *De fide catholica* used to be widely regarded as spurious; but no longer. See, for example, Chadwick (1980).

10. This is an issue that has divided Christian thinkers throughout the ages. Are human souls *naturally* immortal, or are they (or some of them) immortal through a bestowal of divine grace? Although a majority in the tradition before Boethius and Anselm held the former view, several major figures—including Justin Martyr (*Dial.* 5–6), Tatian (*Ad Graec.* 13 & 15), Athanasius (C. Ar. 1.58), Basil the Great (*Hex.* 1.3), Theophilus of Antioch (*Ad Autol.* 2.27), and Irenaeus (*Haer.* 4.4.3)—held the latter. As Irenaeus states the matter, it is God who will preserve the saved for all eternity because "life is not from us, nor from our nature, but is given according to the grace of God" (*Haer.* 2.34.3). This disagreement attained particular significance in the Reformation as a result of Luther's hostility to the idea of natural immortality; and it retains it on a theological level to this day.

11. The word that I have translated "higher animal" is *pecus,* which often means and is often translated as either (more narrowly) *cattle* or (more widely) *beast.* I am guided in my translation by a passage in Augustine (*De Gen. ad litt.* 3.11.16)—though Augustine and Boethius use two slightly different terms: *pecus, -oris* and *pecus, -udis.* Elsewhere Boethius singles out *pecudes* for a special status among sub-human life: they are subject not merely to nature, but are also influenced by the stars (*In Perih.* 2.231). My translation avoids the odd suggestion, which I have seen made, that Boethius had a particularly high opinion of cattle.

12. I have cut this quotation short. What Boethius writes in full is that the impassibility is "like that of angels and the soul." It may perhaps be found puzzling that Boethius contrasts a mutable rational substance—i.e., a human soul—with "the soul." I take it that by the latter Boethius intends the world-soul of Plato's *Timaeus* (on which see *Cons.* III.9, *De mus.* I.1, and perhaps *Cons.* IV, Prose 6).

13. Aristotle himself, of course, often appeals to such a principle. What is significant is that he does not do so in the argument in question, whereas Aquinas feels the need to.

14. "For not only is there not any other essence unless He makes it, but none that is made can at all remain unless He preserves it" (CD 1). Should God withdraw this preserving action, Anselm goes on to say, the thing would revert to the non-being it had in and of itself *(a se)* before it was made.

15. There is some debate as to whether Aristotle himself applied the idea to the present. For a good discussion see Kirwan (1986).

16. For example, Aristotle characterizes the deductive validity of a "syllogism" as being a matter of something necessarily following from given premises (e.g., *An Pr.* I.1, 24b19–22). He also states that it is impossible for anything to infringe (what we would call) the Law of Non-Contradiction (*Met.* IV.4, 1006a4–5).

17. Many philosophers are, of course, unhappy with such reference to nonexistents. Anselm however was not: and so I shall freely employ such turns of phrase while expounding his views.

18. Eilene Serene (1980) has argued that in the late *Lambeth Fragments* Anselm significantly modified his account of possibility, and came to regard the ascription of an ability to exist to a not-yet-existent thing as entirely proper. I am unconvinced by her argument. In any case, however, since we are primarily interested in interpreting Anselm's arguments for *G*'s existence in the *Proslogion* and the *Reply* to Gaunilo, it is Anselm's earlier account of these matters that is relevant to us.

19. References to figures in the earlier part of this tradition were given in the previous chapter.

20. It is perhaps worth mentioning that Anselm in fact never states that God or *G* exists necessarily. The heading of one section of the *Proslogion* does refer to the three Persons of the Trinity as "one necessary being [*unum necessarium*]" (P 23). The section in question, however, mentions necessity only in connection with a quotation from the gospel of St. Luke: "One thing is necessary [*necessarium*]" (Lk. 10:42). What Luke says is that one thing is necessary for salvation. (The traditional English versions of the Bible get it just right when they have "One thing is needful.") The only thing that Anselm adds in his own words is the phrase "that one necessary thing in which there is all good." It is not implausible, therefore, to read Anselm as simply echoing and endorsing the Evangelist's claim that one thing is necessary for our salvation: i.e., for our ultimate good. Another possibility is that Anselm is echoing a passage where Augustine applies the Lucan passage to the Trinity. The one thing that is necessary according to Augustine is the unity of the Trinity: that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be one God (*Serm.* 103.3.4). The fact that in the bulk of *Proslogion XXIII* Anselm is discussing the Trinity lends support to this suggestion. Either way the passage is of no relevance to us. On two occasions, however, Anselm does state that *G is unable not to exist* (R 5 and 9); and on one occasion he implies it (R 1).[20] Given that Anselm accepted the equivalence of *not possibly not P* and *necessarily P* (e.g., CDH 2.16), he doubtless could have employed the language of necessity in these passages (albeit, of course, in an improper way).

21. Serene (1980: 146) makes a similar criticism of Barnes's suggestion.

22. Elsewhere, writing of actions, Anselm states that "while they do not exist, it is not necessary that they exist" (C 1.5). Contraposition of this gives us the thesis that if it *is* necessary (at least at a time) that a thing (at least an action) exist, then it exists.

23. What, however, of "logically impossible things" (such as a four-sided triangle) which are, perhaps, "able" not to exist because they do not exist? Do *they* require something to prevent them from existing? There is evidence that Anselm thought so. At one point he discusses the question, famously addressed by Peter Damian, of whether even God can undo the past. Anselm asserts both that what is past cannot be undone, and also that it is not "impossible" for God to do this. Here Anselm is putting into operation his view that impossibility implies compulsion and external necessity—something of which God is entirely free. No "impossibility" is operative *(operatur),* Anselm insists, but "only the will of God, Who, being truth itself, wills what is true to be always immutable, as He is" (CDH 2.17; cf. V 10). Anselm seems to have thought that it is the Eternal Truth that is God Himself that excluded things that offend against reason, and hence "truth."

24. Strictly speaking, they are co-extensive only if an omnipotent being exists—or, at least, a being with the power to override the natural capacities of things. Since it is clear that Anselm allowed such power only to God, we shall discuss only this.

4. The *Proslogion III* Argument

1. The section headings are almost certainly original, but they were placed together at the beginning of the work, and featured nowhere else.

2. Schmitt, the editor of the standard modern Latin edition of Anselm's works, has a comma after "aliquid"; but there is nothing corresponding to this in the photographic reproduction of the relevant page of a manuscript that Schmitt provides, nor in the two manuscripts in the Bodleian library that I have consulted. This is a matter of some significance, as we shall see later.

3. This is not the end of the translation options, as we shall see.

4. For an argument to the effect that there is a substantive issue here, see Campbell (1976: 92–4).

5. What Anselm actually writes is that God cannot not exist *cogitatione:* He cannot not exist even *for thought.*

6. My translation of the first sentence is a little free, since a literal, or even near-literal, translation would be barely intelligible. The original Latin runs as follows: "Procul dubio quidquid alicubi aut aliquando non est: etiam si est alicubi aut aliquando, potest tamen cogitari numquam et nusquam esse, sicut non est alicubi et aliquando."

7. For a recent example of this error, see Millican (2004: 451); but the culprits are legion.

8. As I mentioned in the Introduction, Anselm regards *better* as entailing *greater.* The very section of Anselm's text now in question indicates this, since he moves from talking about what is *better* to talking about what is *greater* without any explanation.

9. If it is objected that Anselm's immediate comparison is with something temporal that has neither beginning nor end, and that Anselm believed there were no such things (since everything temporal, in virtue of creation, has a beginning), one can reply that Anselm started his "ascent" with a consideration of something that has a beginning and no end. As we saw in the previous chapter, Anselm certainly did believe that there were such things: at least angels and human souls.

10. This is made particularly clear in *Reply V.*

11. As used by Anselm this phrase corresponds, Campbell suggests, to an "arbitrary name" in the well-known natural deduction system of E. J. Lemmon (1965). It equally corresponds to a "parameter" in the modal logical system of Fitting and Mendelsohn (1998) that I employ in the Appendices. Something similar occurs in ordinary English. Suppose I believe that something can dissolve iron. Perhaps there are many such things. Suppose, also, that I come to believe that anything that can dissolve iron is an acid. It would not be at all untoward for me to express this by saying that that which can dissolve iron is an acid. The "that which" construction in no way presumes uniqueness.

12. And the dissimilarity would, of course, be even more obvious if we filled in the modal inferences that allow us to deduce the conclusion from the two premises in the modern form of argument.

13. For those who know about such things, I should say that I am, throughout this work, taking quantifiers to be *actualist* and *objectual*.

14. This is because the universal quantifiers now occur within the scope of a necessity operator, so that their values are not taken just from the actual world.

15. In formal terms, we have $\Box(\forall x)(\Box Ex \supset \Box(\forall y)(\neg\Box Ey \supset Gxy))$ rather than $\Box(\forall x)(\forall y)((\Box Ex \wedge \neg\Box Ey) \supset Gxy))$.

16. Note the way in which Background Assumption (1) figures essentially in my earlier presentation of Anselm's argument.

17. "Maximal greatness" is a technical term employed by Alvin Plantinga (1974: 214–6) in his well-known version of the Modal Ontological Argument. My use of the term does not correspond to Plantinga's. It corresponds, rather, to his notion of "maximal excellence."

18. Some recent philosophers have argued that an eternal being can become temporal. Anselm would have been able to make no sense of such an idea—at least if we leave aside the special and in this context irrelevant considerations pertaining to the Incarnation.

19. Anselm is committed to the view that there is only one kind of eternal being that could possibly exist. We shall briefly consider this matter at the end of Chapter 7. At the moment we are simply concerned to register Anselm's views. Anselm also regards a thing's accidental properties as irrelevant to questions of greatness, at least as they pertain to his argument. However a thing may vary in

greatness because of variable accidental properties, it will never exceed the level of greatness accorded to it on the basis of its essential nature. It is such essential natures alone that Anselm is concerned with. Ultimately, the only relevant point for Anselm is that it is impossible to conceive of anything greater than an (the) eternal being.

20. So only beings that *exist* (in their respective worlds) will be compared in terms of greatness.

21. For an indication of the logical issues raised by comparatives in a modal context, see, for example, Milne (1992).

22. This reflects the requirement, lately noted, that *G* be *essentially G*. Lest it be thought that this premise leaves open the possibility that a being answering to this modal equivalent of *"G"* should vary in greatness from world to world (so long as nothing else can be greater than it is at its lowest level of greatness), it should be noted that when it is said that *nothing possible,* in any world in which it exists, is greater than it is in any possible world in which it exists, this includes itself. In no possible world is this possible thing greater than it is in any world in which it exists.

23. I conduct the proof in S5. A proof also goes through in B. When, however, the premises of the argument are interpreted in accordance with B, they are both metaphysically objectionable and at odds with Anselm's view of things. This can, however, be remedied by reformulating the premises. Since the issues here are somewhat complex, I have relegated a discussion of the matter to Appendix G.

24. Premise (2) of course warrants something stronger than this: namely, that in no possible world is there something that is, in that world, greater than Y is in *any* world in which Y exists. This stronger claim will feature in the demonstration shortly; but for the moment the weaker will serve

25. Adams (1971a: 49–51) gives a modal formulation of this *Proslogion III* argument. His presentation of it is, however, significantly different from mine. As Adams points out, on his construal the argument either depends upon *G*'s actually existing, and, hence, is not independent of the *Proslogion II* argument; or it is involved in all the problems with possibly nonexistent intentional objects that are generally thought to attach to the *Proslogion II* argument; or it only proves "Anselm's Principle" that necessarily, if *G* exists, it exists necessarily. This is because Adams omits anything equivalent to my premise (1).

26. There is a third passage from the *Reply* that some may think provides another case. In the passage in question Anselm claims that if one really is thinking of *G,* one is thinking of something that cannot be conceived not to exist, "for if it can be conceived not to exist, it can be conceived to have a beginning and an end. But this is not possible" (R 3). When the conditional is contraposed, we have it that if something cannot be conceived to have a beginning and an end, it cannot be conceived not to exist." But surely, someone may claim, it is self-evident, at least for Anselm, that *G* cannot be conceived to

have an end or a beginning. This is a purely conceptual point that does not depend on any assumptions about actual existence. This passage is, however, immediately preceded by the claim that *G* cannot be conceived not to exist *because it exists with such truth*. Otherwise, Anselm says, it would not exist at all. The possibility that *G* does not exist has, therefore, been antecedently excluded.

27. It is precisely because of this new metaphysical thesis, which is to be found only in the *Reply,* that the *Reply* can contain Anselm's "other argument."

28. In the *Reply* Anselm makes it clear that he does indeed think that we can determine wholly a priori, by a simple consideration of thing's nature, whether or not something is conceivably nonexistent. This emerges as possible, however, in the light of the metaphysical considerations that surface only in the *Reply*.

29. Here, of course, I offer the reader a promissory note. Part of my case against the suggestion that the *Proslogion III* argument is a Modal Ontological Argument, or any sort of independent argument for the existence of *G,* depends, therefore, on what I shall be arguing in the following chapter.

30. As we shall see in the following chapter, Anselm does have a way of overcoming such resistance—a way, moreover, that is independent of *Proslogion II*. It relies, however, on the metaphysical considerations that are introduced only in the *Reply*.

31. These passages come from the *Reply*. As I have mentioned above, in the *Reply* Anselm makes a metaphysical claim that goes beyond anything in the *Proslogion* and that allows him to make stronger statements about what is conceivably nonexistent or not. However, the two passages we are now considering occur in the first section of the *Reply,* before Anselm has stated this metaphysical perspective.

32. *"Nam potest cogitari esse aliquid quod non possit cogitari non esse."* As I have mentioned above (n2), and as Campbell (1976: 94) himself points out, there is nothing corresponding to a comma after "aliquid" in the manuscripts—something that might perhaps have counted against Campbell's reading.

5. Arguments in the *Reply to Gaunilo*

1. It is reported that Hartshorne eventually came to believe that a Modal Ontological Argument is not to be found in the *Proslogion,* but only in the *Reply*. See Pailin (1968–9: 105).

2. After the first sentence, the phrase "something than which a greater" translates *"quo maius"*—literally, "than which a greater." As I mentioned in the Introduction, this construction can function in Latin, unlike English, as the subject of a verb. It could be translated as "that than which a greater," though my translation strikes me as more plausible, since the first sentence is explicitly about *something* than which a greater cannot be conceived: *aliquid quo maius cogitari non possit*.

3. Such language needs to be eliminated in many people's eyes because it appears to quantify over nonexistents.

4. This is not an adequate representation of the traditional notion of an essence or an essential kind—as, for example, Kit Fine (1994) has ably demonstrated. It will, however, do for our purpose, which is simply to avoid an arguably invalid or dubious form of argument.

5. In case this is not clear from the formal point of view, the claim is: $(\forall\Phi)((\Diamond(\exists x)\Phi x \,\&\, \neg(\exists x)\Phi x) \supset \Box(\forall x)(\Phi x \supset \Diamond\neg(\exists y)\ y = x))$.

6. I am not hereby reintroducing a possibly empty singular term. "X" is simply a handy way of keeping track of what would, in a formal representation, be a variable. I employ it simply to avoid intolerably complex grammatical constructions.

7. This at least is true in S5. If we restrict ourselves to B, the immediate inference would be that X actually exists. However, by appealing to the second premise, we can then infer that it exists necessarily.

8. Adams makes this point in relation to his own formalization of the present argument, which operates at the level of the modal propositional calculus.

9. It is at best only a "reflection" of it—by which I mean that it is (supposedly) informed by the modal intuition that is expressed by the Brouwerian axiom. It is not a substitution instance of it.

10. There are, it is true, systems of modal logic in which the accessibility relation is not reflexive, and which therefore do not enshrine this logical truth. For this very reason, however, none of these systems is ever regarded, when interpreted, as reflecting our understanding of possibility and necessity.

11. What of the following objection to Anselm's claim that to conceive a thing involves conceiving the thing's nature? At least where actually existent things are concerned, surely we can conceive (think of) something, and yet be wholly mistaken about its fundamental nature. I might, in the dark, mistake a bush for a human being. When, subsequently, I think of this entity, and perhaps conceive it as nonexistent, I conceive *it* (a bush), though I conceive it *as* a human being. Similar possibilities arise when my conception of something is based solely on testimony, since I may be misinformed about the fundamental nature of a thing. Anselm never considers such cases. This is because the kinds of conceivings that Anselm is alone interested in are those performed by "reason" or the "intellect." The sort of perception- and testimony-based thoughts I have just considered relate to the senses, memory, or imagination, rather than intellect. A truly "intellectual" conception of something is a conception of its nature. If, however, we push the objection by claiming that Anselm ought to be able to say something about such conceivings, we can perhaps offer him the following. The only aspects of a thing's nature that are relevant to whether we can conceive a thing as nonexistent are absolutely fundamental ontological

features. Ultimately, for Anselm, the only relevant issue is whether a thing is composite and temporal, or not. That is why *only G* (or God) cannot be conceived not to exist. I may mistake a bush for a human being, but I could hardly mistake a bush (or anything else) for *G* (or God)—if only because the latter is not perceivable, and so must be conceived "intellectually."

In fact, Anselm would almost certainly have simply dismissed such "non-intellectual" cases. Note what he finally says about the Fool in *Proslogion IV*. Because of the inadequacy of the Fool's conception, Anselm denies him the ability even to think of God. (Recall, in this connection, the relation between conception, or "thought," and *reason* in Anselm that I pointed out towards the end of Chapter 2.)

12. The very weak assumption is that, given any two "worlds" or maximal states of affairs X and Y, if X is possible with respect to Y, then Y is possible with respect to X. More technically: the accessibility relation between worlds is symmetric (as well as reflexive—on which see note 10 above). Many regard such "reciprocity" as obvious. Even Nathan Salmon, who, as we saw in Chapter 1, doubts the validity of the Brouwerian axiom, has been unable to come up with a counter-example to it. Whatever the grounds one may have for accepting such reciprocity—grounds, I should add, that will have nothing to do with the sorts of metaphysical considerations that moved Anselm—once it is granted, an inference immediately flows from a thing's nonexistence (an inference to necessarily possible nonexistence) in a way that, as we have seen, Anselm would simply fail to recognize.

13. In fact, as far as the cogency of Anselm's reasoning goes, all he requires is that a thing's *fundamental ontological nature*—its being composite or not, temporal or not—be held constant.

14. In case this Anselmian way of looking at things should seem offensive (or incomprehensible), the following disinfected simulacrum will suffice. To think of "a nonexistent" is to think of a possible instantiation of a kind over and above all actual instantiations. The only way to think of such a "thing" is in terms of a nature, or (essential) kind. So, to suppose that "this thing" should exist, is to suppose the actuality of this possible instantiation. On this construal, equally with Anselm's, nature/essence is indifferent to the distinction between existence and nonexistence.

15. There is one final sentence: "And it is even more [absurd] if it can be understood and be in the understanding." Anselm is here adverting to an objection that Gaunilo had made. It need not concern us here.

16. Schmitt, the editor of the standard modern Latin edition of Anselm's works, puts inverted commas around the first phrase. This corresponds to nothing in the manuscripts, and is misleading in so far as it suggests that something analogous to the modern distinction between use and mention is in play.

17. Recall that Anselm repeatedly emphasizes, in passages where he claims that *G* cannot be conceived not to exist, that *G* can be conceived. His concession to Gaunilo in *Reply IX,* is, as *Reply VIII* makes clear, a concession of something that Anselm himself regards as false.

6. Anselm's Other Argument

1. I am assuming that the final employment of the notion of necessity introduces only a *necessitas consequentiae* and not a *necessitas consequentis.* The claim is that it necessarily follows that *G* exists, not that *G* exists necessarily.

2. Bonaventure commends the phrase "beginning with time" rather than "beginning in time" for the origin of the world (*In II Sent.,* d. 2, p. 1, dub. 2).

3. This is not a trivial claim for Anselm. He uses it to disprove the thesis that there is never a time when absolutely nothing exists—since time is something.

4. Anselm elsewhere refers to the choirs of angels praising God "without end" (P 25). He also says of the rational soul that it is "necessarily immortal" (M 72).

5. If the causal agent is God, this "before" will not signal *temporal* priority, since God is not in time. Nevertheless, the "before" does mean that if something is caused to exist, it has a finite past history, and hence a beginning of its existence.

6. This is because it is initially on the basis of aseity that the supreme essence is said to exist "most of all" and "supremely" (M 3).

7. For a recent defence of divine timelessness, see Leftow (1991).

8. I shall focus on the relation between the Father and the Son, since it avoids the irrelevant issue of the *filioque* that attaches to the Holy Spirit: the issue, that is, of whether the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, or from the Father alone (albeit "through" the Son).

9. Although Anselm himself states the matter somewhat differently, this priority was usually understood in connection with the concept of the divine "monarchy": the Father is the single *archē* (principle, or origin, or rule) of the Godhead. One of the reasons for the Eastern church's rejection of the *filioque* was that it was thought to imperil this "monarchy."

10. Gregory Nazianzen therefore suggests that there is an ambiguity in the notion of an *archē.* The Son (and the Holy Spirit) are not without origin as far as causality is concerned *(ouk anarcha . . . tō(i) aitiō(i)),* but they are as far as time is concerned (*Or.* XXV.15). What Gregory particularly stresses in this passage is that although these two Persons are *from* that Father, they are not *after* Him.

11. This concept seems, within Christian thought, to have originated with Origen—for whom the generation of the Son is an *"aeterna ac semptinerna generatio"* (*De princ.,* 1.2.4; cf. 1.2.9).

12. Anselm is explicit about this, in relation to the third Person of the Trinity, in *PSS X*. As for the second Person, albeit in a less explicitly theological context, see the account of the eternal utterance of a "word" by the supreme essence in *Monologion XXIX*.

13. I should perhaps say that two different issues arise in connection with causation and temporal priority. The one we are concerned with is whether a cause as such—i.e., that which is the cause—must exist prior to its effect. The other is whether the cause's exercise of causal power must predate the effect. (In Humean terms, the latter is the issue of whether a cause, conceived as an event, rather than a thing, must temporally precede its effect.) On the latter question, the medieval consensus was that it is not only possible that an exercise of causal power should be simultaneous with its effect, but that this is necessary. A significant factor here was Aristotle's claim that the exercise of a cause's power and the effect that it causes are *one and the same thing* in number, though not in conception (*Phys*. III.3). More generally: how, our traditional figures would have wanted to know, could something be exercising its causal power, if nothing is being effected?

14. The Church Fathers were much concerned with the appropriateness of various prepositions to the task of expressing the relation of the Son to the Father. Augustine, for example, was willing to allow that created things are *"ab"* (from) God, but not *"de"* (of) God: "All other good things do not exist except as from Him, but they are not of Him. For what is of Him is what He Himself is" (*De nat. bon*. 1).

15. As John of Damascus put it, the generation of the Son "is without beginning [*anarchos*] and eternal, being a natural operation [*phuseōs ergon*] and induced [*proagousa*] from His [sc., the Father's] essence" (*De. fid. orth*. I.8).

16. The problem goes back to the fourth-century controversy with the Arians: specifically with the so-called "Neo-Arians," who claimed that God is essentially *agennētos* (derived from *gennao:* to beget). At one point Athanasius, a pillar of (what was to become) orthodoxy, claimed that this term was ambiguous. In one sense, both the Father and the Son are *agennētos,* since neither is created; in another sense, only the Father is, since He alone is wholly without a cause (*De Syn*. 46). The fact that there was an almost identical word *"agenētos"* (derived from *ginomai:* to become) did not help matters. (Indeed, there has been scholarly debate over which term is in question in this passage from Athanasius.) When the terminology settled down, the orthodox account was that the Father alone is *agennētos* (unbegotten), but both Father and Son are *agenētos* (often translated as "unoriginate"), despite the fact that the Son is "caused" by the Father. (See, for example, John of Damascus's *De fide orthodoxa,* 1.8.) Anselm's term *"per se"* corresponds to *"agenētos."*

17. The concept derives from Aristotle's *kath' hauto symbebēkota*. Anselm would have been familiar with the concept through Boethius's writings.

18. As the passage from Aquinas that I have quoted indicates, some traditional figures suggest that all *per se* attributes are *propria*. I believe this is a mistake; but we need not go into the issue, since *propria* alone are sufficient to illustrate the point that is relevant to us.

19. For Aquinas's most mature account of this issue, see *De aeternitate mundi*. Somewhat ironically, in this late work Aquinas cites Anselm himself (M 8) in support of his contention. Aquinas's views on the issue of the "eternity of the world" developed somewhat through his career. For a good account of subtle changes in his position, see Wippel (1984).

20. One scholar claims that on this issue Aquinas may have no more than one "scholastic" predecessor: namely John Scotus Eriugena (Kovach 1976: 170). For Eriugena, see *De div. nat*. I.72; II.20ff; III.5–9.

21. Later in this work Augustine implies that it is agreed on all hands that whatever is caused to exist has an *"initium"* (*De civ.* 11.4.2). This word often means "beginning"; but Augustine recognizes that the "Platonists" interpret it as compatible with eternal causation. Indeed, he goes on to state that they have some sort of justification for this, in that it excludes the idea of God having created the world from some impulse.

22. What Augustine finds unintelligible is how a soul that has existed from eternity could become unhappy.

23. A similar line of thought was pursued by some of the Church Fathers, such as Athanasius and, in particular, Methodius. I shall, however, focus on Bonaventure's presentation of the case, since it is the most detailed.

24. In case it needs saying, the Son's origination from the Father was not viewed as being *ex nihilo*—from or out of nothing. He is, rather, from or out of the Father. (See, for example, Athanasius, *C. Ar.* 1.16). In a sense, of course, everything is from the Father; but the Son is from the Father in a special sense, in as much as He is from the Father's very essence. Athanasius, among many others, makes this distinction very clearly (e.g., *De decr.* 19). Similarly, John of Damascus presents coming from nothing and being from the Father's nature and substance as exclusive (and, apart from the Father Himself, exhaustive) alternatives (*De fid. orth*. 1.8).

25. This case is worth considering, anyway, since someone might claim that all the traditional natural analogies to the eternal generation of the Son by the Father make no sense in the context of modern physics; and so are, perhaps, metaphysically impossible.

26. We shall consider the issue of occasionalism, and the related notion of "secondary causality," in some more detail in the following chapter.

27. Cross characterizes occasionalism as the view that God is "causally sufficient for every effect there is" (Cross 2006: 406). Occasionalism, however, is not merely the view that God is the sufficient cause of everything, but that He is the *sole* and sufficient cause of everything. The reason why Cross charac-

terizes occasionalism in the way he does here is that in the preceding paragraph he had claimed that "an agent is causally sufficient for an effect only if its production of the effect does not *de facto* involve the causal powers of some other agent." But this is not at all how the term "sufficient cause" is generally understood. If it is stipulated that this is what the term is to mean, then we must say that we have been given no reason to believe that God needs to be the "sufficient cause" of everything in the word in *this* sense, if the world is eternal and God is the *fons et origo* of all being.

28. This is the doctrine of divine "concurrence" (in distinction from divine conservation). More on this in the following chapter.

29. I trust it goes without saying that this does not constitute a criticism of Cross's argument, which was not intended as a contribution to the present issue.

30. John Hick (1968) in effect levels this charge against Hartshorne. According to Terence Penelhum (1961: 91), "it is an ancient but unhallowed confusion to identify this sort of necessity [*sc*. "factual" necessity"] with logical necessity and this sort of contingency with logical contingency." Like all such high-handed modern diagnoses of old philosophical "mistakes," Penelhum's criticism is sustained by either ignorance or lack of understanding. Even the "moderns," Hartshorne and Malcolm—and Penelhum's *aperçu* occurs in a discussion of Malcolm—are guilty of no such confusion. They may be wrong, but hardly confused.

31. This is something of an over-simplification. The interested reader should consult Hartshorne's own rich and detailed discussions of these matters. The essential point for us is that his understanding of modality has an ineliminable metaphysical dimension to it.

7. An Assessment of the Argument

1. That it really is, however, *Anselm's* argument that is to be assessed, one that is genuinely implicit in his reasoning, is borne out by Chapter Two, where I argued that Anselm regarded the inconceivable and the absolutely impossible as mutually entailing (with a qualification there noted) .

2. As I mentioned in Chapter Five, this is not an adequate representation of the traditional notion of essence. It will, however, do for our purpose—which is simply to avoid an invalid or dubious form of argument. An alternative approach would be even more "specific," and deal with *haecceities* or *individual essences*. For an argument similar to the one I am about to embark on, which adopts this approach, see Loux (1984).

3. In case it is not obvious, I should perhaps say that the possibility operator here takes "wide scope" with respect to the quantifier. The premise says that there is no possible world in which there is a divine being that is caused: it is not merely saying of any actual divine being that it cannot possibly be caused.

4. Or, if this is doubted on the basis of the doctrine of the necessity of origin, it is surely the case that any (possible) everlasting star is of an essential kind such that this kind *can have* a non-everlasting instance.

5. To put the matter in a way that conforms to the reformulation of Rowe's objection given in the previous footnote: It is far from clear that there can be an essential kind of star such that it is impossible for there to be a non-everlasting instance of it.

6. It is secured even by the B system of modal logic.

7. Scotus runs through his argument on two other occasions: in the *Ordinatio* (also sometimes known as the *Opus oxoniense*) and in the *Reportata examinata*. In the former (*Ord.* I, dist. 2, pars 1, qq. 1–2, n. 58), however, we get no more of an argument for the crucial move; and in the latter (*Rep.* IA, dist. 2, qq. 1–3, n. 29) we get none.

8. Anselm reflects this in his own terminology: "Nothing is through [*per*] nothing. It cannot even be conceived that there should be something that is not through something." The "supreme essence" alone is through *itself,* and grounds the existence of everything else (M 3).

9. I shall be using the term "cause" as equivalent to "external reason." Since the reasons in question are *sufficient* reasons, "cause" means "total cause." In what follows, we shall consider versions of PSR that do not require reasons to necessitate what they are reasons for. My use of the term "cause" does not, therefore, imply necessitation: it stands for any external reason that *suffices to explain*.

10. In case it needs saying, "the reason" in question may be a *complex* reason, possibly involving numerous causal factors. In such a case "the" reason will encompass them all.

11. One could distinguish between two intermediate scopes. One would apply PSR only to the fact that a thing exists at all. The other would apply it also to the fact that a thing has the properties that it has. Nothing in what follows hangs on this.

12. Some libertarians hold that there are free actions that are performed *for no reason*. Alexander Pruss (2006: 126–9) has argued that these libertarians ought not to regard such radically free actions as exceptions to PSR, because they should regard them as *self*-explanatory.

13. It has, indeed, been argued (e.g., Garrett 1979) that Spinoza *requires* this stronger principle for his own proof of God's existence.

14. I am assuming that a non-terminating, infinite regress of reasons simply conflicts with any version of PSR. I am wholly unimpressed by the so-called "Hume-Edwards Principle" that would deny this. For a discussion of this principle, see Pruss (1998).

15. For a recent extended defence of PSR, see Pruss (2006).

16. See, for example, Ross (1969: 295–304), Rowe (1975: 99–111), and van Inwagen (1983: 202–204)

17. There is not a commonly agreed term to denote just what I have in mind by "individuals." What I mean are particular entities that are not states, processes, events, or "tropes." I have in mind what used to be called "individual substances."

18. Leibniz held that PSR is one of the "two great principles" on which our *reasonings* are founded. (The other is the principle of contradiction.) He goes on to distinguish between truths of reasoning and truths of fact. The former are necessary (*Monadol*. 31–33).

19. For the case against Hume being a "Humean," see Wright (1983) and Strawson (1989).

20. If one held PSR in a form with a somewhat wider scope than the one we are now considering, a contingent version of PSR would seem to be ruled out. Suppose PSR held contingently. Some versions of the principle will demand a reason for this very fact. Why does PSR hold? It is difficult to see what answer there could be other than that it has to.

21. Alfred Freddoso (1991: 555) states that Durandus de Saint-Pourçain "is the one and only well-known medieval proponent of mere conservationism, or at any rate the only one cited as a champion of this position by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers."

22. For an account of Islamic Occasionalism, see Fakhry (2007).

23. There was some debate, especially between the Dominicans and the Jesuits in the sixteenth century, over the precise nature of God's contribution. Did God contribute to the bringing about of an effect because He immediately acted on the causal agent (by way of "premotion," as it was called), so that God caused the agent to cause the effect (as Dominicans, such as Bañez, held), or did God act immediately in the production of the effect (as Jesuits, such as Molina, held)? All that is relevant for us is that both sides wholly concurred in the view that God's causal contribution was necessary if any created causal agent was to give rise to any effect.

24. I am, of course, considering only "real" attributes and not merely logical attributes such as *being self-identical,* which are clearly of no relevance in the present connection.

25. I am here following the traditional understanding of these matters, which is more sophisticated and adequate than typical modern accounts. In particular, the traditional approach avoids the incoherent notion of the subject as a "bare substratum," since on this traditional view an essence is not an attribute that "inheres in" a subject, but is that which constitutes the very being of a subject. (Incidentally, for those in the know, I am using "accidental" in the "predicable" rather than the "predicamental" sense.)

26. One can clarify the notion of an extrinsic attribute a little more by saying that an extrinsic attribute of a thing is one a change in which would constitute a "mere Cambridge change" in the thing. For the introduction of the notion of a mere Cambridge change, see Geach (1969: 71).

27. There must be other constituents according to the present suggestion, for otherwise the attribute in question would itself be the whole essence.

28. Probabilistic accounts of causation, from which our interest in this particular way of "weakening" PSR arose, do not require that a cause render the existence of the effect more probable than not. They require only that the cause *raise* the probability of the existence of the effect beyond what it would otherwise be. In the present case, however, where we are applying the notion of probabilification not to causes but to internal reasons, probability-raising has no application. For what would the comparison be? As we have seen, the internal reason in question must be an essential nature. It makes no sense to ask if an essential nature's *being what it is* raises the probability of there being an instance of that nature beyond what it would be if the essential nature *were different from what it is*. So the probability in question must be a categorical intrinsic probability.

29. Alexander Pruss has argued for the coherence of the notion of a self-explaining *contingent* state of affairs. As Pruss recognizes, however, his case stands up, if it does at all, only in relation to free actions as construed by the libertarian. As he himself puts the matter, "A self-explanatory contingent *being* [as opposed to an action] would be too much to swallow" (Pruss 2006: 124).

30. As we saw in Chapter One, this inference is validated by the B system of modal logic, and, in particular, by its "characteristic axiom" that if something is possibly necessary, it is actual.

31. This is true whether the background logic is that of S5 or B. We get necessity if we employ the latter simply by applying the operative version of PSR to the divine being that has been shown actually to exist.

32. Alternatively, as we saw in Chapter One, we could just stipulate that the "God" in question is a necessary being. But then we are given no reason to believe that such a God is so much as possible. The present argument gives us a reason to accept this, if it is granted that God as traditionally conceived—characterized, initially, not in terms of necessary existence, but aseity—is possible.

33. Remember that the probability in question is an *a priori* probability. It is not a probability given the way things actually are—with, for instance, all the evil and suffering that there is in the world.

34. This version of the argument will not deliver the conclusion that a divine being exists *necessarily*. We will, however, be able to reach this conclusion, should it be desired, by supplementing the argument by an application of the *contingent* positive version of PSR.

35. Recall that the negative version of PSR requires that the reason for the obtaining of some negative states of affairs must ultimately be some positive state of affairs.

36. The implied positive version is weak, because it need not be the necessitated version we considered above. It need hold only in "nearby" counterfactually relevant worlds, where at least the same laws of nature hold.

37. Note that this version of PSR is restricted to (all possible) *positive* cases of "individuals" existing. As Richard Gale and Alexander Pruss (1999) have shown, a possibilist version of PSR that applies to all truths, both positive and negative, entails the corresponding "actualist" version of the principle.

38. My stipulation that the kinds in question be essential kinds is important. No possible exemplar of the somewhat contrived "kind" *such as to come into existence without any reason or any cause* could, clearly, come into existence for a reason or through a cause. This supposed counter-example is related to one due to Alvin Plantinga and Alfred Freddoso as reported in Loux (1984: 162, including n.15). Incidentally, I take it that there is a typographical error in this article. The objection as actually stated makes no reference to the absence of a reason or cause—which makes the objection nonsensical.

39. As it actually stands, Anselm's argument explicitly states no more than this, of course.

40. If the background logic is that of B, rather than of S5, we cannot conclude that a divine being exists *necessarily.* We shall have to settle for Hick's "factual necessity." Whether or not this is a disadvantage, S5 is, for reasons I go into in Appendix G, much more faithful to Anselm's way of thinking; and I am myself strongly inclined to go with it. This means, therefore, that I incline to the first of the two ways of responding to Nathan's Salmon's objection to S5 discussed in Chapter One. His sort of counter-example gets no purchase when a divine essence is in question.

41. "Necessarily, for every haecceity, *H,* if *H* is such that *H*'s exemplification is only contingent, then it is possible that *H*'s exemplification be caused" (Loux 1984: 162). "There is no contingent existential statement which is not such that it can be consistently causally implied by some other contingent existential statement" (Ross 1969: 178). Although it may not be obvious from this formulation, Ross's principle, like Loux's, applies to all *possible* cases. This is because Ross applies the term "contingent" to merely possibly true statements (so long, of course, as they are also possibly false).

42. Ross, it is true, claims that his version of PSR "is a logical truth" (Ross 1969: 178; cf. 109–114). He never substantiates this claim, however.

43. We briefly considered this matter as it concerns the Modal Ontological Argument toward the end of Chapter One.

44. Recall that Anselm's argument is concerned with *essential* natures. As far as the argument is concerned, a divine being that turns Lot's wife to salt

and a divine being that does not may both be possible (though not, of course, compossible), since the argument will not prove the existence of any divine being with such an accidental qualification.

45. If this (to my mind, absurd) option were taken, a defender of Anselm's argument would have to hold that there is only one set of compossible essential divine natures, and that all the possibly realized divine natures fall within this set. The argument would then prove the actual existence of all these divine beings, and only these.

46. One ground for believing this is the traditional view that God is totally simple. As I pointed out earlier, if this view is not accepted, we should at least hold that any two divine attributes are mutually entailing. If this is the case, we cannot distinguish a second possible divine being from a first by subtracting or adding a divine attribute or two.

47. What of such "Platonic" entities as numbers, universals, and so forth? A problem may be thought to arise here, not because the existence of all such entities is in and of itself objectionable (if you are a "Platonist"), but because their existence would be established wholly independently of God. This is an issue that the tradition did not, in fact, address unanimously. (For a good, historically informed treatment of the matter see Clarke (1982).) Briefly, the issue should be addressed, I believe, as follows. First, there is no problem unless a really robust form of "Platonism" is adopted: one whereby such "entities" are accorded a sufficiently substantial mode of existence that the question of the *reason* for their existence arises. Second, if such existence is accorded them, aseity should be denied them. This would not entail Descartes's notorious doctrine of the created "eternal truths," according to which it is contingent which such "truths" God created. A more usual traditional account regards their ontological dependence on God as consisting in the fact that they are the necessary contents of divine thought.

48. Another line of argument, which was popular among the Rationalists, is that a nature to which a greater degree of *realitas* attaches has a greater claim to existence than any nature that has a lesser degree. Since God is *ens realissimum* . . . (See, for example, the Scholium to Proposition Eleven of Book One of Spinoza's *Ethics*.)

Appendices

1. I say that this is the usual interpretation. Aquinas discusses Anselm's argument on two occasions in "Questions" that discuss whether God's existence is self-evident *(per se nota).* Aquinas famously claims that the proposition that God exists is self-evident *in itself,* but not *to us,* since we lack insight into the essence to which the subject term refers. An argument such as Anselm's, the implication seems to be, requires this to be the case. When, however, Aquinas turns his attention explicitly to Anselm's argument, he does not mention this general consideration; and what he does say is too brief to be convincing. In-

deed, Aquinas says little more than that such an argument just cannot work, and that the existence of the thing to be proved—namely God—must be presupposed (*In 1 Sent,* d. 3, q. 1, a. 2c and ad 4; *ST* Ia, q. 2, a. 1c and ad 2). In other, briefer discussions of Anselm, Aquinas simply asserts that the nonexistence of God can be conceived, since God's existence is *per se nota* only to God (*De verit.* q. 10, a. 12 ad 2; *In Boeth. de Trin.* q. 1, a. 3 ad 6; *SCG* I.11). It is interesting to note that in these latter discussions Aquinas seem not to have Anselm's famous *Proslogion II* argument in mind, but an argument in *Proslogion III* with which we shall be much concerned in the present work.

2. Several discussions in the present work suffice, I believe, to justify this claim.

3. Most people discuss Kant in relation to the Ontological Argument because of his discussion of it in the *First Critique*. In one of his early, "pre-critical" writings, however, Kant (1968: 72) does state outright that existence is not a predicate *("Dasein ist gar kein Predikat").* He makes it clear, however, that he is equating *"Predikat"* and *"Determination."*

4. Kant's remarks are, indeed, so wide of the mark in relation to Anselm's argument that many have suggested that Kant was not directing his criticism against Anselm's original version of the Ontological Argument, but against a version to be found in such Rationalists as Descartes and Leibniz.

5. As G. E. Moore (1936: 175–6) points out in his characteristically careful way, when people debate whether existence is a predicate or not, they are not arguing over whether the word "existence" itself is a predicate. Obviously it is not. What is at issue is whether finite parts of the verb "to exist" (such as "exists") are predicates.

6. It may be of interest to note that Kant, in the pre-critical work of which I have already made mention, states that although existence is not a predicate of a thing, it is a predicate of the *thought* of a thing (Kant 1968: 72).

7. Those who speak of the "logical form" of natural language sentences often exhibit it by representing the sentences in the language of formal logic. The sentence in hand would then (if we ignore the implied tense) be represented by "$(\exists x)(x = a)$." I should mention that this works only if the quantifiers are "actualist." If the quantifiers are "possibilist"—i.e., if they range over merely possible as well as actually existing individuals—no such representation is possible, and the "existence predicate" must be taken as primitive.

8. Examples of this include Hospers (1967: 427), Smart (1955: 34), and Ryle (42, 64). Kneale (1936: 154) implies that when people like him deny that existence is a predicate "in the logical sense," what they mean is that it does not stand for an attribute.

9. Sandra Visser and Thomas Williams (2009: 84–92) have argued that Anselm's argument involves no such claim. But what, then, are we to make of the fact that Anselm, after having pointed out that something than which a

greater cannot be conceived can be conceived to exist in reality *as well as* in the understanding, states that "this is better" (P 2)? Visser and Williams's interpretation is, I believe, undermined not only by their having to admit that Anselm is here expressing himself "in a quite misleading way," but also by their admission that nothing at all is to be found to outweigh the apparently obvious intent of this passage in the *Proslogion* itself. They offer, instead, a somewhat indirect argument based on passages in the *Reply* to Gaunilo.

10. The minor differences, which are hardly worth mentioning, are that I number my lines, stack premises at the beginning of the proof, and cite (some) justifications at the end of lines.

11. This appendix is meant primarily for those who are sufficiently at home with logical systems such as the present one that a few pointers may be enough for them to get the hang of the present system. Those less familiar with such matters should, of course, consult Fitting and Mendelsohn.

12. A negated universal quantification such as "$\neg(\forall x)Fx$" is treated as if it were "$(\exists x)\neg Fx$," so that the Existential Rule applies; and a negated existential quantification such as "$\neg(\exists x)Fx$" is treated as if it were "$(\forall x)\neg Fx$," so that the Universal Rule applies.

13. So I am always taking a *possible* world to be one that is possible with respect to some world or worlds. It is not merely some member of the total set of "worlds" considered independently of accessibility relations. A contextless "possible" will, therefore, always mean possible with respect to the *actual* world. (Analogous remarks apply to possible individuals.)

14. When I say that it "may" exist contingently in the actual world, I mean that we can construct a model of our argument of which this is a feature. In other words, we can, compatibly with what our argument states, and with the nature of the accessibility relation in B, just stipulate this.

15. The discussion of Gareth Matthews in Chapter 2 should be borne in mind.

16. It is true, of course, that in the *Proslogion III* argument Anselm claims that we can *conceive* of something that *cannot be conceived* not to exist. This, however, does not amount to an embedding of conceivabilities, because of the way Anselm makes reference to possibly nonexistent intentional objects. What Anselm is saying in this passage is that we can conceive of something, X, and X cannot be conceived not to exist. There is no embedding here. We simply have a conjunction. It is true that if we forego reference to such intentional objects, and are "actualists" as far as quantification is concerned, we cannot represent what Anselm is saying without embedding the conceivings—and, hence, when modally rendered, without embedding modal operators. But that is another matter.

17. The argument does, it is true, leave it open that there may be some *possibly possible* (but not possible) object that is greater. But, as I have said, Anselm had no time for such things.

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